

BUBBLE REPUTATION

BY ALFRED BUCHANAN



Hoyt

1913

BUBBLE REPUTATION.



BUBBLE REPUTATION.

A STORY OF MODERN LIFE.

BY
ALFRED BUCHANAN.

“Though the many lights dwindle to one light,
There is hope if the Heavens have one.”

SECOND IMPRESSION.

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EDITOR'S PREFACE.

MY brother, who for the last eleven years has identified himself with Australian Journalism, sent me in MS. from Perth the pages that follow a twelvemonth ago. He left it with me to publish or not to publish. The verdict of the first English publisher to whom I submitted the MS. was: "The scenes and setting are not those of the conventional English novel." I agreed, but maintained that the fact was no whit to their detriment. We in England to-day have a growing desire to see the social life in our Colonies *as it is*—nothing extenuated, nor aught set down in false glorification.

The sketches that follow enable us to see—almost *feel*—the very pulse of those of our own race and language who live and work out their destiny under sub-tropical skies, in other lands and amidst other social environments than our own. John Rayment is a faithful picture of a perverted Labour member, and Edith Grey is a true representation of the

❧ Editor's Preface.

type of womanhood—not unrare in Australia—that blossoms in the heart of the storm.

This faithfulness of portraiture is enough reason in itself for giving the book —albeit without the Author's final revision—to the British public.

E. S. BUCHANAN.

Bubble Reputation.

CHAPTER I.

TWO PEOPLE.

“’M tired of it,” said the girl, leaning back in the chair and folding her arms over her head. “I suppose I ought to admire it. I know it’s very Australian, and all that, but my limited intelligence isn’t equal to it; I’m sick of it. Why can’t you say something?”

The man standing next to her—he had been leaning his arms on the balcony-rail and looking out across the descending vista of bush and mountain to the reddening sky-line—turned his head. Then he picked up the book that lay open on her lap, and looked at the cover reflectively.

“I’m afraid you’re not patriotic,” he said.

“Perhaps not. And yet I don’t know—I think I am patriotic—only I must have something to be patriotic about. I don’t think they treat us fairly.”

“Who are ‘they’?”

“Oh, authors, critics, writers—that kind of people—especially English critics. They seem to think

that a thing won't be Australian, and that it can't be right somehow unless it's all about snakes, and gum-trees, and dry water-courses, and billy-cans, and wire fences, and beef and pumpkins, and someone called Bill or Sal. I know there are pumpkins and wire fences in Australia, but I don't see them; they don't interest me."

"Quite so," remarked Barraclough. That was the name of the man who was still leaning his elbows on the balustrade. "I am inclined to sympathize with you there. Yes, if we are to read novels, I don't see how we can do better than stick to the duke and the heiress, and the rest of them. Those are the kind of people that you can learn something from; they know what to say at the right moment, even if they don't do what is proper at the right time."

"I wasn't joking," said the lady stiffly.

"Neither was I," he answered calmly.

"I was talking about Australian literature, and the things they say about Australia."

"And I quite agreed with you. But isn't it a rather dry after-dinner subject?"

"I should imagine you would be the last to think so."

"H'm!" remarked the man, with deliberate non-committal intonation.

"Let us talk seriously," said the girl.

"By all means," he assented.

"Here we are in the most picturesque part of Australia—one of the finest places anywhere."

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"I grant you that," said Barraclough.

"I think it's grand. It is magnificent. I love these mountains. To me they are like—not like home exactly—but like something better than home. Directly you get past Penrith, you feel as if you were going back to an old friend. They always seem to have a welcome. When you're tired of things in town, and people begin to get on your nerves, and you haven't the energy to crawl about the house, and your complexion won't keep a decent colour if you go out-doors—well, you can just get into the train and come up here. And then it's all different. You're in another world. And aren't they splendid to look at! Leura, and Wentworth, and the Three Sisters, and that 2,000 feet precipice, and the grand old forest out there, stretching miles away from the house right yonder to where the sun sets. Why don't they write about that? It's as good as the Engadine, or the Tyrol, or any of those places. I'm sure of it. It is what makes me think Australia is going to be a great country, and not for ever worrying about its dry creeks and its rabbit-fences. You're laughing." She stopped abruptly.

"Not for a moment ; I was deeply interested."

"Oh! yes, you were. I saw a smile come over your face. You think a woman doesn't bother about these things. That shows you don't know everything, Mr. Wiseman, although you are a lawyer, and get such a lot of money for giving such bad advice."

Barraclough turned round, frankly amused. It was evident they understood each other.

"If I smiled," he said, "it was because I couldn't help wondering whether you ever talked to O'Brien like that."

It was the girl's turn to laugh, but it was a laugh with a doubtful, not wholly satisfied thought behind it.

"I wonder where he is ; he must have left us alone for fully twenty minutes."

There was no immediate reply, and the chatter of voices within the house became more audible. The dusk of the January day had turned into night. It may have been that both the man and the woman were sensible, in some fashion—more or less vague, more or less unconscious—of the influence of the hour. This sub-tropical twilight of Australia has a habit of impressing itself on the imagination. No *St. Agnes' Eve* could have been written by an Australian in Australia. But a *Hymn to Proserpine* might have been. To most of us, northern or southern, pagan or ascetic, the throned Cytherean is more real and more inviting than the sister to sorrow. The Australian night is essentially pagan. Perhaps for that reason it does not pall. Kindly and caressing, sensuous and subduing, it will make the greatest sufferer and the most hardened sinner forget that there is either sin or suffering—until the next morning.

One or two people strolled out on to the balcony.

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They sauntered up and down for a while, and then subsided into one or other of the cane chairs that were put out to catch the evening breeze. A group of three—two women and one man—planted their coffee-cups on a small round table, and buried their heads in close and animated conversation. But from whatever reason—or for no reason at all—the man and the girl were left undisturbed.

“If you are not going to talk to me,” said Miss Rayment, “I will go inside.”

“Don’t go,” he answered, with some show of interest. “What shall I talk about?”

“About yourself, just for a change.”

“That’s always a fascinating topic for one person,” said Barraclough, “but for the other person, likely to be tiresome.”

“Yet, isn’t it suspicious if a man *never* talks about himself?”

“I don’t know ; perhaps it is. I daresay most of us—but you know me better than most people. Don’t say you do not. It is generally safe to assume in these cases that what isn’t known isn’t worth knowing.”

“Have you ever——” she began, and hesitated.

“Yes?” he murmured, in low-voiced interrogation.

“What was *she* like?” inquired the girl abruptly, looking at him.

“Um!” answered the man, with much deliberation.

“You are not going to say there’s been no one?”

"If you are asking me whether I've ever been in love, I should say 'probably.' There's always a certain amount of doubt about that—afterwards. On the whole I am inclined to think I have been in love. But it was a good while ago."

She gave him a look from the chair, that might have meant admiration, or might have meant the reverse.

"The learned signor takes it for granted that I take a *sisterly* interest in his domestic affairs."

"Oh, no. But just on the spur of the moment I can't think of anything that might be worth mentioning, or that you don't know yourself. My mode of life—what is it? Now and again people give me briefs, and numbers of your Australian citizens—a dozen of 'em at a time—favour me with a stony stare, while I endeavour to make the worse appear the better reason."

"So nice and modest for a man who they say is doing so splendidly at the bar! And how good of you to confess so much about your past career!—I'm beginning to think there must have been something dreadful about it; something mysterious and long ago, before you came out to Australia."

"It is your turn," he rejoined, "to be as candid as I have been."

"Oh! I've nothing to tell. You know I've nothing to tell. If I had, there wouldn't be any mystery about it. Haven't you known me ever since I was a girl—you have, haven't you?"

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There was a certain amount of insistence in the question which seemed hardly called for in the circumstances.

"I should say you had lived," said Barraclough, turning round and looking at her critically, with the air of a much older man—older than his years alone would have justified—"in a rather unhealthy atmosphere. You see, your father is well off; of course to that in itself there can be no objection; I'm not sure that it isn't an advantage." He made another of his deliberate pauses before going on. "And then you are rather clever. At least, if you will allow me to say so, I think you would have made an extremely clever woman if you had cared to play that part. That again is anything but a drawback. I am one of those who have always worshipped cleverness in woman—from a respectful distance. But then, you see, you are decidedly good-looking, and that's what makes the whole business so unfortunate."

"Oh!" exclaimed the girl, half flattered and wholly surprised at this diversion.

"You must see for yourself, if you will look at the matter in a dispassionate light, that it is very unfortunate. Your cleverness doesn't get a chance. Your money doesn't get a chance. Your good looks don't get a chance. You never quite know where you are. You don't know why so many people run after you; whether it is your mind they're interested in, or your money they appreciate, or whether it is

the wave of your hair and the way you look when you smile that really takes their fancy. It must be very annoying. A woman ought to know. I think she has really got a grievance against Providence if she doesn't know. I am old enough to tell you about these things. Yes, I think it must be very hard luck."

The girl, still half flattered and at the same time a trifle annoyed, looked up at him with a wondering expression that gradually disappeared and gave place to an audible sigh. Barraclough, having said his say, turned round and continued leaning on his elbow, looking out into the night.

It was almost dark. The solitary figure of a man, who had been reclining on one of the cane chairs, rose and began slowly pacing to and fro, cigarette between his lips. The girl turned her eyes in his direction ; but he came no nearer.

When she spoke, it was with a certain petulance and impatience.

"I'm not at all clever. It's the last thing I would ever try to be. But it would be a treat to meet a clever man now and again. It would be like a new sensation. The men that talk to me, and say they admire me, are not clever ; or if they are, they disguise it so well that no one would ever suspect it. When I say 'clever,' I don't mean a walking encyclopædia of legal knowledge, with no more sentiment in his whole body than there is in a bag of sawdust. I don't mean anything personal."

"Of course not," remarked Barraclough urbanely.

"I mean someone who would be worth while ; someone who wouldn't be quite like the ordinary ; someone who would have brains, and who, while everyone was talking about him, would be really and genuinely in love with you."

"You don't mean to say that you have got tired of O'Brien !"

It was an audacious question, but with all his impassivity, he might have been a little nettled at her last "impersonal" sentence.

"If you please, we will leave him out of the question."

"What would you do, when you have found—say, this clever person ? Marry him ?"

"I don't know ; I don't think so. I wasn't thinking about that, but it would be a new experience—an experiment."

"Must your experiment be a moneyed man ; or would you be satisfied with great ability, and a coat out at elbows ?"

"Yes, I wouldn't care how poor he was. It's not as if I wanted him for ever."

"Why not give the stranger a trial ?"

The girl turned her eyes toward the figure of the man who was disappearing through the balcony doorway into one of the lighted rooms.

"You mean ?—" she said interrogatively.

"Yes, he seems quite out of the ordinary. I was talking to him this morning."

"It might be worth trying," she assented.

"At the same time," he remarked, "there's always a chance in these matters of burning one's fingers."

For answer the girl laughed a laugh in which merriment was mingled with no shade of misgiving.

CHAPTER II.

A MAN TO BE ENVIED.

T was the height of summer, and, as is usual at this time of the year, the house was filled with visitors. The large wooden building, with its high, airy rooms, its carpeted stairs, its broad balconies and verandahs, and its rambling yet imposing frame-work, conveyed an impression not only of coolness, but also of comfort and hospitality; an impression that was accentuated by the rugged and gloomy environment in which it was set.

There are probably few people, knowing Australia and knowing the Blue Mountains, who do not wish to return to them sometimes, who do not regret them sometimes, who cannot recall some pleasurable experience of which they were a part. In the European sense they are still almost undiscovered. They can still be written about. Your up-to-date author, with that conscientious determination to acquire local colour which makes him such a mine of information in these days, has so

far been content to leave them alone. No doubt their turn will arrive. The day of their greatness—and the day of their littleness—must come. Meanwhile they are comparatively untenanted. It may be said of them as of the island in a certain romantic poem, that “Nature with all her children haunts the hill.”

The Australian Bush—that straggling, unending vista of scattered timber and gumleaf, which spreads itself for miles upon miles from plain to plain—has been stamped by the representative Australian novelist with the imprint of weird melancholy. It is a permanent phase, and has been accepted. But when the Bush rises to meet the mountain, the outward character and the inward spirit of the scene undergo a change. The weirdness is there still; the melancholy suffers eclipse. After all, the melancholy fit is a product of decay and change, and this part of the world is singularly free from both.

The eternal sameness of these millions of gum trees, looking in the aggregate like one gigantic mantle mightily mantling a titanic mound of earth; the unbroken silence of crag and precipice, of ravine and mountain-side; the rare, very rare gleam of silver showing where a stream or waterfall is making its way downwards to the coast; the marvellously clear skyline, melting in the dim distance into a continuous sweep of bush-covered plateau—all this has a temper and character of its own, not

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to be met with elsewhere, indefinable by any word, inexpressible by any phrase. Great and gloomy, uninviting and forbidding, impassive and impenetrable, forever frowning upwards to a forever smiling sky—such is the unchanging temper of these mountain crags.

Yet the visitors at this time of the year were, for the most part, a merry company, well versed in the social axiom that nature and solitude are indifferently amusing when you happen to stay at the right house, and surround yourself with the right kind of people. It may have been that one or two of the less travelled, less *blasé*, guests appreciated the outlook to the full, more especially when they watched the mists of early morning breaking over leagues of bush-covered mountain; or when they saw from the balcony of the house a wild sunset first flare and then fade over a darkening and majestic landscape.

But custom innures us to most things. It is even doubtful whether it is quite good form to become too enthusiastic over these matters. There seems reason to believe, if you hear a man talking too insistently about a place and its attractions, that he is arguing himself a comparative novice, and that he is not really the travelled and wealthy person you might otherwise expect him to be.

One of those who did not claim any super-sensitiveness on the score of natural beauties—though he prided himself on being able to exercise a wise discrimination in regard both to people and places—

was Geoffrey O'Brien. As he belonged to a class that is to be met with in most parts of the world, and a class that every right-thinking person should be pleased to associate with, he may well claim a certain amount of respectful attention.

When anyone called Geoffrey O'Brien a lucky beggar—and the phrase was used sometimes to his face and oftener behind his back—the speaker usually meant what he said. If a clear income from landed property of £2000 a year, good health, good digestion, and years numbering little more than the quarter century, do not justify a man in being called a lucky beggar, what does? For his own part he was usually tolerably certain that he was lucky. He saw nothing to grumble at. He was not the kind of man who worried over things. In spite of all a man has, or is likely to have, temperament may prove his worst enemy, and may pursue him with unrelenting bitterness from end to end of the earth. But even in this important particular O'Brien had been well treated. Neither his nerves nor his imagination ever gave him much trouble. Whatever or wherever the feast at which he was regaling himself, there was no spectre to share it. He may have had a suspicion that men who were considered smart, men like Barraclough for example, might be inclined to laugh at him, even when they went out of their way to ask his opinion. But against this suspicion there was the consoling reflection that he could buy most of them out, three or four times over.

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For nearly eighteen months now he had attached himself to Miss Rayment. During that time he did not profess to have been absolutely constant. But somehow the other fancies did not last. As he said himself, they had a habit of flickering out in a few days, or at most a few weeks. It was a pity. It would have been better, he would have thought more of himself, if he had not been compelled to come back with such regularity to this woman. She led him a nice dance. He knew she was unmanageable. He knew she had no great love for him. Yet he had a belief that some day she would marry him. He was confirmed in this belief by the reflection that she was a sensible woman. For the life of him he could not see how any sensible woman could in the long run refuse such a match, if only because of the solid advantages that would follow from it.

But the girl had lately worried him. He had even told one or two of his friends that she was getting on his mind.

"Getting on your what?" said one of these individuals—a man with a reputation for a bitter tongue.

For answer Geoffrey turned his back on the man and closed up like an oyster. He might not set up for a genius, but he was not going to have fellows talk to him in that fashion. He had thought of leaving Sydney, of going away somewhere, perhaps to Tasmania or New Zealand, perhaps to Europe. There was nothing like a change if a man was feeling

a bit upset. Probably it would put him alright. He had made up his mind to some such course of action when he had met her out on the lawn that morning. Geoffrey's first impression on that occasion had been one of lively satisfaction at finding Maud alone; for to find her thus had not been by any means a common experience of late. Yet the interview had been less than wholly satisfactory; and the expostulations into which he had let himself be drawn were, as he afterwards reflected, rather undignified. They made him look too much like a puppet in her hands. What did one woman matter? There were so many others. And if this one imagined for an instant——

But after all *she* did matter. It was just as well to look things squarely in the face. And, to do her justice, she was different from others—more subtle, more versatile, more clever, and at the same time more like a woman. Yes, he might go a long way and not meet with anyone quite like her again. He was not her slave—he told himself this with great determination; but in bare justice to himself, as a man of taste, it must be admitted that there were grounds for his preference.

The interview that morning had been brief, though on his part a trifle stormy. Had she been less tactful, or had she shown less genius for understanding masculine character, there might have been an end to all things between them. Nearly six months ago he had gone the length—the extra-

ordinary length—of asking her to marry him. And though she had not absolutely refused, she had not bound herself in any way — had preferred, as it seemed, to keep him within call, and allow him to claim her with some half understanding.

“No, no, no,” she expostulated pleadingly that morning, when he declared that he was being made to look foolish, and that it would be better to say definitely what was to happen. If she had been angry or defiant, he would perhaps have been angry and decisive ; but her tone of entreaty—the way she had leaned and looked towards him — made him feel that she was really as fond of him and as proud of him as a girl might naturally be expected to be, and that only some temporary obstacle stood in the way.

Possibly there was more in that last reflection than he had imagined. Was there any obstacle ? What obstacle could there be ? Although he knew that Maud Rayment was a recognised social success, that she went everywhere and met everybody, he knew it had not always been so. Her father was a self-made man. Over his early career, before he made money and became a Minister of the Crown, it was usual to draw a veil. Geoffrey wondered what might have happened to the girl in those early stages, and what influences, personal or impersonal, had helped to make her what she was.

After talking to her that morning on the lawn, he avoided her, and for the greater part of the

day hung about the house, smoking, walking up and down, paying visits to the billiard room, talking to the barmaid, talking to men in the hotel, going anywhere but where he thought he would meet the girl. He knew she and her mother were in the house—that they had not gone out all day. He was determined not to go near them. About a couple of hours before sunset he took a horse from the stable and rode out. When he came back it was nearly dark, and the horse bore signs that it had been ridden hard and far.

After dinner the tempter appeared in a new and sophisticated shape. It argued in this fashion. The evening has to be put in somehow. Why make a martyr of yourself when there is no need? The girl has been shown—you have shown her—that a man can be quite determined.

Geoffrey felt that the tempter was getting the better of the argument. He compromised with his dignity and joined the others upstairs.

At a late hour that evening he was talking to Mrs. Harper. She was a sympathetic, unusually broad-minded woman, and, what was even more to the purpose, an intimate friend of the Rayment family. From the vantage ground of ten years' seniority, she was quite willing to give a young man friendly advice.

"It appears," said Geoffrey, "that they have asked Ward to go with them to-morrow. Not

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the sort of man I should have asked myself. She seems to have taken a fancy to him though. Tells me she was with him nearly all the morning, and found him 'original'—whatever she meant by that."

"Well, if you will act the part of Achilles."

"Eh! what has Achilles got to do with it?"

"Wasn't he the brave fighter who once sulked in a tent?"

"Now, really," he expostulated. "If you mean to insinuate—if you think I am such a fool——"

She interrupted, "Of course I'm not insinuating, and I see it's no use giving you advice, because you would not take it if I did."

Geoffrey cleared his throat. It was not often that he spoke of anything that had a strain of sentiment in it, more particularly where the sentiment, or what passed for the sentiment, affected himself. But he would have liked for many reasons to get an expression of opinion from Mrs. Harper. He hoped she wouldn't go away just yet. She was one of those sensible women who never said too much, and wouldn't give you away if you told them confidences. And a man of twenty-five has a great respect for the opinion of a woman of thirty-five, where other women are concerned.

Geoffrey found his voice, and said he was sorry. He daresay he was a bit mule-headed. But somehow, he didn't mind admitting it, he didn't like to see her talking so much to other fellows. Dashed

fool to care about it, but there it was. Not that it was a matter of any consequence.

"Quite right," she assented brightly, "it's not a matter of much consequence—hardly worth talking about, in fact."

"And yet—" there was a dogged note in his voice, which seemed to say that the matter was of consequence—"you said this morning that if you were in my place you wouldn't go with them to the Falls to-morrow."

"Did I?" she replied with animation. "But surely you haven't been troubling about it since."

"Then why did you say it?"

"Well, it's like this, as my learned husband would say. There are two unknown quantities—your opinion of her (though I can guess at that), and hers of you. As to the latter, I cannot speak. But I'll tell you a secret—if you want a woman to make advances to you, keep out of her way."

"Why?" The tone was persistent. "Why did you advise me not to go to the Falls?"

"Simply because, if you want to know, the lady has the reputation of being dangerous. I don't say it in any spiteful way. She is too old for you. I don't mean in years, but in experience."

"What! You think she—you think I—oh, 'pon my honour, it's out of the question, I wouldn't be such a fool as all that. You must think I'm a very susceptible kind of a Johnny."

"Oh, no," she answered, "not more than any

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other man your age. You all get over it in time. I'm not saying a word against Maud. I wouldn't for the world. I am her friend and her mother's friend, and to some extent her father's friend. I only said she is considered dangerously fascinating. Most women would consider that a compliment. I only said it because I thought you wanted to know my opinion. If you are satisfied that there is no danger — you know better than I do — you should go in and win."

"It would look silly to stay away now," said Geoffrey.

"Perhaps it would. And it is a lovely part of the country you are going to. I'm sure you deserve her; and I'm not so sure she deserves you. Now, could I say anything nicer than that?"

CHAPTER III.

THE WOMAN'S POINT OF VIEW.



THE holiday season was beginning to wane. The week-end trippers—that numerous and persistent class whose footsteps follow the railway further and further into the heart of a Continent—had already taken their departure. Only the more leisured and the more leisurely stayed on.

One of those who had announced their intention of going back to the city within a few hours was the reputedly learned, reputedly silent man whom we have heard talking to Maud Rayment on the balcony of the hotel. It would be a mistake to assume that Barraclough was in any sense popular or well-liked. Professionally, he was well known and generally respected; but individually he had the reputation of being too reserved, too “English,” to make him a favourite with the great body of the people who knew him by name. Nevertheless, when, after opening his letters at the breakfast-table, he announced his intention of returning to town that

evening, there were several reproaches, and more than one expression of polite dismay.

For, as it happened, he commanded the warm regard of those people—and there were very few of them—who professed to know him intimately. They included the Rayment family, Miss Muriel Dorrington—the latter a Judge's daughter, and a young lady of many brilliant and doubtfully useful accomplishments—Geoffrey O'Brien, and Mrs. Harper. All protested that they had been relying upon him for the Falls next Saturday, and that it was too bad to leave them in the lurch.

Barraclough duly acknowledged these regrets, and made his apologies. Then he betook himself to one of the drawing-rooms and devoted half an hour to the morning paper. Maud Rayment came in and inquired whether he intended going with them on a drive that was being organized to some place of interest in the neighbourhood. If he would not go himself, did he know of anyone who might be asked to join.

He was sorry to have to decline as he had letters to write, nor could he think of a substitute.

"Well," she said, "there is half an hour before we start. What shall I tell the others about you?"

"There is nothing to tell; but in case the opportunity doesn't occur again, I am tempted to talk seriously to you—in fact, to give you advice."

"Don't be exasperating," she exclaimed. "You know I'm always anxious to take your advice—provided it is anything in reason."

"You remember what we were speaking about last night? I have thought of it since, and I am not quite sure whether you were in earnest. If you were not, it doesn't matter; if you were, I must say I think it would be a pity."

"What would be a pity?"

Before he could reply, O'Brien walked into the room, but seeing the two engaged in what looked like close conversation, walked out again. The girl followed his retreating figure with an amused look.

"I was only going to say," went on Barraclough, "that a girl—especially a girl like you—is liable to do things which seem harmless enough, but which may lead to a lot of trouble—especially where men are concerned. We were talking about the stranger—that mysterious friend of yours."

"It was you mentioned him first," she put in quickly.

"Perhaps I did. There was no need to have brought him into the conversation. I only mean that if you are looking for amusement, distraction, that sort of thing, it would be as well to leave him out of the question. It would be better to leave him alone."

"Oh, oh!" she exclaimed, rather taken aback and slightly offended. "What have I been doing now?"

The Woman's Point of View. §6

"I know you will say it is no business of mine. Neither is it in one way ; and yet in another way it may be. I don't know much about this man Ward. Perhaps you do. I can't say that I care very much what happens to him. But I'm interested in you, and I'm old enough to give you advice. It would be a pity to have it said that you played the mischief with one or both of them. I shouldn't think any woman would care to let that go abroad."

"Is that all?" she inquired with suspicious calmness.

He went on unconcernedly, "A man is a better judge of some things than a woman. Anyone can see that this other one—Ward—is impressionable ; he's in that stage. I've heard somewhere that he's clever : a rising man, likely to do things some day. The kind of man, in fact, that you say you'd like to meet and exchange ideas with on art, and literature, and politics—not to mention other things that might drift into the conversation. Very agreeable he is too ; but it's dangerous—it really is—to try and handle the two of them, in broad daylight so to speak. They will both see what is going on, and the probabilities are—I may say the strong probabilities are—that neither of them will like it."

"And so your advice is——"

"Is to leave Ward alone. Give him time to develop. Unless you are prepared to let O'Brien clearly understand——"

"Will you be good enough as to leave Mr. O'Brien out of the conversation?"

"Certainly. What was I saying? About Ward—it would be a pity if he were sacrificed; and although I repeat that his debacle in a matter of this kind mightn't affect me or you either, I think it would be a mistake to let yourself go down in your own estimation; or if not in your own, in other people's. Even a girl like you has to think a little about her own reputation. I'm not talking about the conventions: they can look after themselves."

"Is that all?"

"Absolutely the last word, for this and all future occasions. You're not offended? Give me your hand on it."

She pouted, looked at him doubtfully, and then with a laugh, put her hand in his. He just touched the tips of her fingers, and then rose as if to go.

"Wait a moment. You've had your say. It's only fair to let me have mine. Would you like to know what I think of you and your advice, Mr. King's Counsel? Shall I tell you?"

Barraclough slightly raised his eyebrows.

"If you like, certainly," he said, "but I can't see any reason just at this moment why you should bring me into it, or drag my frailties—which I admit are numerous—from their dread abode."

"Bah! You are as serious as on a Bench of Judges; and as solemn as an owl that's lost its way among the tombstones. You can say what

you like to me ; I'm not offended. I suppose I ought to sit quiet and fold my hands and think to myself, 'How true! how proper! how wise of him! It's the learned Mr. Barraclough talking. Come and listen to Sir Oracle, and while he talks let no dog bark. If I'm good, he may pat me on the back!'"

He was looking down at her with the puzzled, entirely impersonal expression that one gives to a piece of mechanism whose movements are not thoroughly understood.

"What I do say is, that you men are not fair."

"Not fair," he repeated meditatively. "How not fair?"

"You're not fair. Talk to us—talk to me—about reputation, about convention! Do you think a woman doesn't know more about those things than you do? Isn't our whole life a study in conventions, from the cradle to the grave?"

"Possibly," said Barraclough; "but from my limited observation I should say that the woman who disregards the conventions finds it bad policy in the long run."

"I daresay. I wasn't thinking about one class of women—though I'm not sure that I wouldn't rather be one of them than one of the other people, looking like mixtures of virtue and vinegar, that I saw sitting bolt upright at one of father's political meetings. But this I do think, that men like you, with your knowledge and your brains, ought

to try and help us to some better and broader way of living, instead of talking about our reputations, and our conventions, and what we ought to do, and what we oughtn't to do."

"I am afraid you have altogether misunderstood me," said Barraclough. "I would be the last man in the world to dictate to any woman what she ought to do. All I meant to say was that it was dangerous to play with more than one man at the same time. That was all."

"And isn't it just as dangerous to play with more than one woman? And yet how many of you do it? I don't mean you in particular; but how many men in the world are satisfied to be admired by only one woman, I wonder?"

"H'm!" murmured the barrister, "isn't that a bit outside the track? If you are going to advocate the theoretical right of woman to do all the foolish things that men have done from time immemorial, I haven't a word to say."

"No," said the girl more gently, and with less assertiveness in her voice; "it isn't that either. I know there's a limit. But there are some things you might do—which would make everything better worth while—but they won't let you do them if they can help it. You know what I mean."

"I'm afraid you overrate my powers of comprehension."

"I don't want to manage the affairs of the country. None of us do—not really. But I do want to have

some say in the management of my own affairs. If I want to talk to anyone, I'll talk to him. And if he wants to make love to me, he can. So long as it pleases me, why shouldn't he? Do you want us always to sit down with folded arms; or go about with labels on our backs to say that we belong to Mr. So-and-so, and that Mr. Somebody-else mustn't come near because Mr. So-and-so mightn't like it?"

There was nothing in his face to say whether he was impressed or disapproved.

"Give us the right to love whom we like, and to say to the people that please us what we like, and you can have all the rest."

"Do you think that would work out well in practice? Do you really think it would?"

"Not if everyone was like you, prepared to frown on a woman the minute she gets outside the groove she's been running in since the time of the ark."

"Again I'm bound to say that you do me less than justice. When I spoke of a certain course of action, which seemed to me the wisest in the circumstances, was I frowning or wishing to frown on anyone?"

"Well," said the girl still defiantly, "you know what I think—and I'll tell you something more. I'm not going to have any of the amiable old ladies of Sydney, or any other place, telling me what I ought to do, and what they are quite sure would be the best for my reputation. Reputation indeed! How many crimes have been committed in the name

of somebody's reputation? If it ever seems worth while—I don't say that it ever does—I won't be satisfied to be robbed of happiness and presented with a reputation. If I can't have both, I know which one I'll choose. What do you think of that Mr. Knight-of-the-serious-countenance? Dreadful, isn't it? Shocking, isn't it?"

"Not in the very least," said Barraclough; "on the contrary, quite instructive and entertaining."

"There, you've made me tired. I'm not going to talk to you any more. You stand there like a cold iron slab of intellect that moves about on wheels and hinges. Go and talk to Muriel Dorrington. Go and make love to her, and then come back and tell me about it. Go and find out you're alive."

She had been talking heatedly, and she was now looking up at him, her cheeks flushed, her lips half parted, her eyes aglow. It occurred to him as he regarded her for a moment without replying, that she would have made an admirable model for the Royal Academy picture of a Bacchante, with the sunrise over her cheek, and the vine leaves in her hair. Then again he reflected that this woman, strong-minded and insurgent, yet emotional and passionate, might be an instrument in the hands of the Fates for avenging on men some of the wrongs inflicted on the hearts of women—and might perhaps wreck herself in achieving this end.

He was about to make some reply when a man entered. Seeing the two together, as though in

confidential talk, the new comer stopped rather awkwardly, and made as though he would have left the room, but the girl spoke to him.

"Don't go, Mr. Ward. Mr. Barracclough has been talking to me about woman's rights, and I've been telling him he knows nothing about the subject. Will you give us your opinion?"

Barracclough laughed.

"Really," he said, "you have vanquished me at all points. I leave you with the honours of war."

He went out, and the other man, who was younger and apparently lacking somewhat in self-possession, seemed uncertain whether to follow or to remain. He looked at the girl, and saw there was an implied invitation in her glance.

"Oh, here you are! The horses are ready, and they are all waiting."

There was a rustle of dresses, and chatter of voices. Two women, dressed for a morning drive, entered the room. The three swept out together. One of them threw a backward, farewell glance at the man named Ward, who had sunk into a chair, and who half-eagerly, half-disappointedly, was watching them go.

CHAPTER IV.

THE EDGE OF THE PIT.

“H? What? What did you say? Someone come to see me? I must have been asleep.”

The man in the chair turned his head as if startled out of a reverie. The loose hair falling over the forehead, and the luminous eyes were, if not peculiar to, at least characteristic of Arthur Ward. Perhaps through neglect, perhaps through confinement indoors, the hair was looser, the eyes more luminous than usual. And the face was more than ordinarily pale. There had evidently been an accident. His left arm hung in a sling.

It was a gentle, mobile-featured girl of apparently not more than twenty or twenty-one standing in the room. She looked at him hesitatingly, wondering whether he had been asleep, wondering whether it would not have been better to leave him undisturbed.

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"He is coming upstairs," she said. "I heard him ask the hall-porter if you were in."

"Who is it?"

"He said he was your brother."

"Did he? The chances are"—with the curious smile which made the otherwise not remarkable features look remarkable—"the chances are that he is then. Can't think of any reason why a man should want to be my brother if he isn't."

A young man, not much more than a boy, came in unannounced. The girl looked at him for a moment, looked from him to the man in the chair, and then left the room. The newcomer was not so interested in the object of his visit that he had not time to look at her as she disappeared.

Arthur held out his undamaged hand. The look each gave the other was plainer than words. The elder man's gaze, being interpreted, said,

"I am glad you have come. But I have been here a long time—why didn't you come before?"

The younger one merely remarked,

"You have had a nasty accident—how are you getting on?"

It needed no soothsayer to discover which current of feeling ran the deeper, which stood to lose more by the other's loss.

"I am glad you have come"—the temporary cripple was putting his thoughts into words—"I suppose you couldn't get away sooner? I know.

Lots of things to look after in town. I am getting on well enough now. Nothing really serious. But I have had nearly a fortnight of this. I have sat in this chair looking out through the window watching the sky and the bush, the bush and the sky, until they have come and gibbered at me, and I had to turn away for fear something worse might happen. I have never thought of so many things in my life, never wanted to do so many things in my life, never been so restless in my life, and I have been able to do nothing except sit there. The girl you saw in the room just now——”

“Nice-looking girl,” remarked the other parenthetically.

“She has been good to me—looked after me in one way or another most of the time. Except for her I have hardly spoken to a soul.”

“How did it happen? I know nothing except that you were coming back from a picnic—wasn’t it—and were thrown out of a trap.”

“It is so long ago, Bertie, that it is hardly worth recalling now.”

“Not a fortnight yet—and I want to know.”

“There is nothing to tell. It wasn’t out of a trap—merely an ordinary commonplace kind of accident, the one remarkable thing about it being that it wasn’t worse. We drove to the Falls—about seven or eight of us—and I foolishly went scrambling round in various places looking for

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flowers and that kind of thing. Something gave way, and I was at the bottom. It was about thirty feet, but some branches helped to break the fall."

The boy listened with deep apparent sympathy and wide-opened eyes. "You make light of it, but it must have been a narrow shave."

"It might have been worse—or better," he added moodily by way of after-thought.

"In one way," said Bertie after a pause, "this may turn out very well. Rayment's wife and daughter were there, weren't they? Rayment is one of the few men in Parliament who have made money out of the game. They say that the daughter will come in for a good thing some day."

"Do they?"

"Of course, you know quite well that they do, and I suppose there have been kind inquiries, and all that."

"A few, but what follows?"

"The girl has got money, and she takes a fancy for the man who nearly broke his neck. That is what follows."

"Perhaps it ought to follow, but does it? Can't say I ever thought of it myself."

"You never thought of it?" The tone implied both impatience and disbelief.

Arthur laughed. It was intended for a scornful laugh, but was not quite a success. "Now, what

do you mean? Do you mean that I ought to marry this girl, or ask her to marry me, or that I am to presume on the fact that I spoilt the pleasure of their outing by meeting with an accident?"

"Rubbish! I know something about women." The boy spoke with the air of a man of forty. "I know something about her. One of the best-looking women in Sydney, and one of the best off. For your own sake—it is not a chance that comes every day. Besides"—the boy's tone was appealing—"you might think of others."

How often had this appeal been made on behalf of "others"?

"There are some things that a man can't do even if he wanted to do them."

"It's my belief, anyhow," said the boy doggedly, "that she would marry you fast enough if you asked her."

"That's ridiculous. I know what you mean—you would like me to marry a rich woman to get you out of a monetary fix. But you ought to know enough about women of her class to know that she is after higher game. At present she is playing with O'Brien, and if she thinks it worth while she will marry him."

"O'Brien's a fool. Everyone knows he is. You can talk to her. In spite of all his money your chance would be better than his. You can think I am selfish if you like—but it is for your own good."

"For my own good. Very well, I will think you meant that, and I don't mind telling you, if you ask me, that the girl did make an impression on me, that I did follow her about at the Falls, and that I have thought of her since I have been here a great deal more than there was any need to do, and a great deal more than is good for me. There you have it. But that is all. I am not going to ask her to marry me ; in the first place, because she wouldn't if I did, and in the second place, because I am not sure I want to marry her or anyone. And as the best of us are liable to fall into temptation and do foolish things, I shall make it my business to keep out of her way in the future."

"Very well." There was a hard note in the voice, and a look on the boy's face that altered it for the worse. "You know your own business best."

He got up from the chair and stood at the window, looking out into the shadows, which grew deeper every minute. Seen in profile against the window his face was like a delicate pencil drawing. The elder brother looked at him—a look in which some fondness and admiration were blended with the kind of pity that one feels for a wayward child.

"Is there anything I can do for you, Bertie?"

"Nothing, thanks," curtly.

"Is it the same old trouble? Have they been bothering you again?"

"Not worse than usual."

"Well, if you will spend money when you can't

afford it there can only be one end. I have warned you——”

“Oh, yes, you’ve warned me. You were always great at warnings. I never knew anyone much better.”

“You don’t want to quarrel, do you, Bertie?”

“No,” said the boy, swinging round petulantly and sharply, “I don’t want to quarrel, but I am sick of everything, and I don’t know, and don’t much care, what the end’s going to be. That’s how I feel about it anyway.”

“If nothing has happened within the last few days, I don’t think you need fret. I will be back in town next week and will look you up. I might be able to give you a hand. You must know that I will do anything for you that I can do. I am only sorry that it is not more.”

“I daresay”—indifferently. “I must be going,” looking at his watch; “it is just seven now, and the train goes at seven-thirty. Good-bye.”

The other man’s face was paler, his eyes a shade larger than usual.

“Don’t say good-bye like that.” He was speaking very earnestly, his eyes on his brother’s face. “That’s not the tone that ought to be used between us. Now, before you go—it is only five minutes to the station—listen to me just a minute. I may be able to do a great deal more for you in the future than I have done yet. If I can I will. I think you know that. It isn’t a matter of words.”

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He stopped, and went on again.

"Since I have been here, certain things are clearer to me than they were before. I have been wasting time. I have played the fool. In one way I have played the fool worse than you have. Don't say I haven't; I have. But that's all over. I am going back to work. I am going back to play every card I have got. And before I have finished I may win the cards of some who hold stronger hands than I do now."

"I know one thing. You would play a fair game."

It sounded like a rather grudging tribute, but it was sincere.

"I hope I would. But you don't know what it is, Bertie; you can't know what it is to feel as I have felt; to feel that you have something to say and can't say it because no one will listen to you; to see doors that you want to enter, that you should enter by every right of equal justice and intelligence and decent behaviour, slammed in your face; to sit still and choke yourself while all the red, ripe apples of the Hesperides are falling into the laps of people who affect to despise and patronize you because you have nothing; and you can do nothing, and are nothing—and yet you know that by every law of the eternal and the infinite you have at least as much right to despise them."

"Rather an old story, isn't it?" said the boy; he had heard something like this before.

The other changed his tone.

"So it is. I don't often rave. It's rather childish, and heaven forbid that I should set myself up over anyone. I mean only this. I mean that I am tired of being kept down like a beetle under a glass. If I am to live like that I would rather not live at all. I intend when I go back to begin systematically working up some influence that may take me into public life. I have got something to say—whether it is worth saying or not, I want to say it—whether on a platform or on paper, it doesn't matter which, so long as I can get the people to hear. I can't say it now. I might as well be dumb, or go down to the cliffs and shout over the edge of them. They wouldn't hear and the public wouldn't hear, but it is possible—I am only saying it is possible—that some day they may."

Bertie was shrewd in some ways.

"I expect it's the girl," he said, "who has brought you to feel all this."

"I don't know"—with a rather cynical smile. "If I was a better man I should be content to go my way and do my work, whether I got credit for it or not. I daresay the girl has made me feel restless and bitter in some ways. But I was also going to do great things. I was going to do them years and years ago. And now I'm twenty-eight. It is a respectable age, twenty-eight. And I have done nothing yet. If I ever am going to do anything, it is time to begin. If I succeed, I shall be glad for my own sake, and I shall be glad for yours. And if I fail, why, millions

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of better men than I have failed. That is all I am going to say. I mean it, Bertie, ten thousand times more than you are likely to believe or understand. I am feeling better now. It is a relief to shout at someone after hearing so many things shouting in your own mind at you. You have got nearly ten minutes yet. Good-bye."

CHAPTER V.

THE LABOUR MEMBER.



R. JOHN RAYMENT, Minister for Education and Labour, was seated in his office with the usual pile of papers in front of him. The blotting-pad near his left elbow contained the ashes of his cigar. His silk hat rested upon the table. His legs were stretched out under it. The two morning journals lay alongside the pile of official papers. One of these—the one that advocated popular views, and, in the supposed interests of democracy, had always supported himself—had been barely glanced at. The other—the less widely read, but more scholarly production—had been carefully conned. For the organ of his own party he had a supreme contempt. For the opposition sheet he had a secret admiration. This morning there was on his strong, aggressive face an expression of concentrated thought, as though he, usually a determined man of clear and single purpose, were confronted with a problem of some complexity. So, as a matter of fact, he was.

Circumstances had made Rayment the champion of a militant Labour Party ; but he was becoming more and more impressed with the belief that Nature had intended him for something very different. Everything that upper housemaids used at one time to call "genteel," everything that smacked of luxury in the more ostentatious sense of the word, had for him a strong fascination. As he progressed in the world, he was able, with caution, to gratify his tastes in this respect. His education was meagre. Until a few years ago his reading had been confined to daily and weekly prints, to the frequent fighting pamphlets that embodied the views of his party, and those sensational works of fiction that the modern youth discards when he is thirteen. But now the successful politician adorned his office with copies of Beaconsfield's novels, and the poetical works of Rossetti and Omar Khayyam. He never mentioned these things to his Labour colleagues. But to University professors, barristers, and other reputedly learned persons with whom, from his position as Minister of Education, he was often brought in contact, he talked the small talk of literary culture with just enough knowledge to save himself from being absolutely ridiculous, and enough brazen assurance to provoke a wondering smile.

By those who knew him personally, and by those who did not, he was always referred to as a conspicuous example of the self-made man. Interviewers

without number had sought him out to ask for particulars of his career. Foreign journals had written columns about his early struggles, his indomitable perseverance, his extraordinary will power. Local platform speakers had found him useful as a text from which to point a moral. Any reference to his championship of the Labour cause would always evoke a cheer from any public meeting containing an infusion of the democratic element. But in his own mind he could estimate these things at their proper value. They were useful—no one knew their utility to a public man better than he did—but they were a long way from representing the truth. As to his career, he was astute enough always to speak of it with just that humility which an intelligent audience expects, and just that touch of self-assertive arrogance that a fighting democracy will always applaud.

How had it been achieved, this career of which the public made so much? He would confess to himself—under no circumstances to anyone else—that it had been thrust upon him. He had one great virtue as a leader of men—he knew exactly what he wanted. He took care that others should know it. If it was only, as in his working day, shorter hours, cheaper tobacco, cheaper and better beer; if it was only the passing need of a passing moment, he invariably said to himself, “What I want, the others want too. If we make enough noise the chances are that we shall get it.” At the Union, at the

mob meeting, at the caucus of the party to which he belonged, his speech was always the most direct, his method the most concrete. While the others thought more, understood more, and hesitated more, he invariably achieved the most. The wave of party, with scarcely an ebb or a set-back, had carried him straight towards his goal.

The stroke he was now meditating had dimly presented itself some months before. But with his usual directness he had kept to the matters in hand. The question now was whether his position was strong enough to warrant a decisive step. The democrats on whose shoulders he had risen were becoming more distressful every day. He was sick of the sight of their ragged clothes, their loud-mouthed poverty, their appalling lack of the luxuries and decencies of life. They still believed in him—he had taken pains that they should still do that—but all his sympathies were with another class. At present he was a Labour Leader. What he wanted to be was a National Leader. The question was, could he gradually shuffle off the companionship of these noisy and objectionable persons, and become the head of another and more prosperous party—a National Party? Was he strong enough to do it? And was he clever enough to do it without raising too dangerous a storm?

He touched a bell, and his private secretary appeared. The duties of this individual were rather those of an amanuensis than of the private secretary

whom some politicians treat as guide, philosopher, and friend.

True to his character for masterfulness and self-reliance, the Labour Leader had hitherto entrusted his most intimate business to no one but himself.

“What are my engagements this afternoon?”

The secretary produced a memorandum book.

“At 2.15,” he said, “you have a deputation from the University Senate. That has to do with the proposed reduction in the Vote for Higher Education. At 2.45 you have an appointment with Briggs, the London Trades’ Union man. At 3 o’clock you are to receive the president and council of the Anti-Sweating League. A deputation from the unemployed is due at 3.30. There is a Cabinet meeting at 5. At 7 you attend a dinner to Senator Perkins, the visiting American. At 8 o’clock you will address a mass meeting in the Trades’ Hall on the question of the minimum wage.”

“Is that the lot?”

“You have also promised to go through the papers in connection with the McSlattery case, to look in at the Select Committee on Tobacco Growing, to give an answer to the Chairman of the Factories’ Commission, and to accompany the Chief Secretary on a visit to the Lunatic Asylum.”

“H’m. I must put some of ’em off. It will have to be the unemployed. Tell ’em I can’t possibly see them to-day, but will put their case before the Cabinet. Say I am considering the question of

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throwing open work at scrub-clearing. Telephone at once. Ask for the Secretary. Say something civil."

"Shall I tell them to come to-morrow?"

"No, not to-morrow, nor the next day either. Say this day week, if they like, about the same time."

"Yes, sir."

"And, Davidson!"

"Yes, sir."

"I asked you to make enquiries about a Mr.—what's-his-name—Ward, who wrote to me a week ago. Did you do so?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well?"

"Nothing much known about him except that he coaches students for examinations. Is not, so far as I can find out, connected with any political party. He is said to have written a book of some sort, but I could not get hold of a copy. Should say no one ever read it. Is not known to have any decided views about public questions, or, if he has, has kept them to himself. There is nothing known against him."

"That means he hasn't been found out. But if he calls this afternoon you can let him in."

"Very good."

"And telephone at once to the Trades' Hall."

"Yes, sir."

When, about an hour afterwards, Arthur Ward

prepared to sally forth on his errand to the Ministerial sanctum, there was a feeling of anything but gaiety at his heart. Matters had not gone well with him since his return from the mountains. His illness and enforced absence from town had caused pupils who would have come to him at the beginning of the year to go elsewhere. He had been obliged to give up his old rooms in Curzon Street. He saw himself threatened with a still lower descent. From the financial and other points of view the outlook was decidedly the worst that had presented itself yet.

It was only after long deliberation that he had decided to call upon the Minister. Before meeting the daughter, before knowing she was in existence, the career of the man had interested him as it had interested many others. What had this successful demagogue done—after all he was only a superior kind of demagogue—that others with more knowledge and greater advantages could not do? Yet he had succeeded; others had ignominiously failed. Might it not be after all, Arthur asked himself, that the man's crudities and mental limitations were his greatest strength. His directness, his coarseness, his entire lack of subtlety made him the natural champion of a class that hated finesse, and despised, as a class, anything that could not be put into practical shape. Up to the present Rayment had been the man for the occasion, and the occasion had made him what he was. But a change was coming, if it had not come already. The Minister could not

indefinitely continue on the lines of the irresponsible private member. As holder of a portfolio, and particularly as holder of the Education portfolio, he was constantly being asked to do what brute force and verbosity could, of themselves, never do. Whether he knew it or not, he needed assistance. This was the opportunity that presented itself to Arthur's mind. He knew that hundreds of people applied to public men for an engagement, and in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred were refused. But it was worth a trial.

So far as Miss Rayment's influence was concerned, the young man preferred not to question himself too closely. Perhaps if he had never met the daughter he would not have thought of approaching the father. More probably he would. There was something more than a sentimental interest at stake. If in some capacity or other he could assist Rayment, there were many capacities in which Rayment could assist him. That was a fact that stood by itself, independent of anything else.

"The Minister will see you," said the attendant, urbanely. Feeling like one who is being initiated into strange mysteries, Arthur gave a pull at the green baize door and stepped inside.

The occupant of the room was sitting back in his chair. As usual, the large and substantial desk in front of him was littered with papers. As usual, he fixed a hard, questioning eye on the new comer. His strong, irregular features conveyed no impression,

encouraging or otherwise. He had just been listening to a long-winded deputation in reference to an academic subject, about which he knew nothing. It had cost him a severe effort to be tactful and ensure non-committal. He was stretching himself now with a feeling of relief, crossed by some shade of annoyance.

"Take a chair," he said briefly, rather brusquely. "You wished to see me?"

It was not a hopeful reception. It chilled the other man's expectations very nearly down to zero. Yet as he sat down in a chair close to the official desk he found himself scanning the face opposite for traces of likeness to a softer, more beautiful face that he knew well.

"I won't detain you more than a few minutes," he said, in a voice that he strove to make as cold and business-like as the Minister's own. "I think I explained the object of my visit when I wrote to you."

"Yes." The swing chair came round a few points, and the penetrating eyes looked a little more genial. "You supposed that a man in my position must have a lot of work to put through, and you were kind enough to offer some assistance. Wasn't that it?"

The slight note of sarcasm in the voice threw the visitor on the defensive. He sat up stiffly. Was he to be specially singled out for humiliation—and at the hands of this man of all others?

"I beg your pardon," he said decisively, all his

hesitation now gone, "if I have taken up your time without cause. But I know—everybody knows—that there is more in your Department than can be looked after personally by any one man. I mean matters of policy and things of that kind. You are Minister of Education and Labour as well, and either Department would be more than enough for most men. There is the University question to begin with. You have to deal with that. Then there is Technical Education, Roman Catholic Education, Primary Education for the masses, Higher Education for those who can get it, the question of who ought to get it and who ought not, the question of attracting and keeping teachers, the question of State subsidised secondary schools, and heaven knows how many more. I know that you have to receive deputations, dictate letters, make speeches, talk to the newspaper reporters, and advise the Cabinet in regard to everything. I ventured to call upon you because most of my life has been given to a study of one phase or other of the education question, not only here, but in other countries as well."

"Possibly you have heard it whispered, Mr.—er—Smith—I mean, Ward—you may have heard, Mr. Ward, that my own education has been on—well, popular lines."

The note of sarcasm was this time more pronounced.

The visitor rose to his feet.

"I see that I have created a wrong impression.

I am afraid that I must have expressed myself very badly. It is surely open to any man, even the poorest, to offer his services. They can only be refused. I have thought—but I see it is no use detaining you further.”

“One moment. We might as well be candid, Mr. Ward.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“I want us to understand each other.”

“That was precisely what I wanted myself. I thought my letter took some trouble to explain.”

“You were generous enough to say you could be of use to me, eh?”

“If I wanted to be of use to you it was because I knew you could be of use to me. I am not generous. I don’t pretend to be. I can’t afford to be. When a man applies to you for work, say on the railway line, you don’t sneer at his motive. He may be ready enough to help you, but his chief anxiety, poor devil, is to help himself.”

He stooped and picked up his hat. His smile was a trifle sickly. He was beginning to see possibilities that were not pleasant to contemplate. He was leaving the room when the Minister called him back.

“Stop a minute. I think it is quite likely you may be of service to me.”

The applicant for employment stood still wonderingly. Was this a new turn of the man’s

satiric humour? If so, he was not so abject and humiliated that he could not show he resented it.

"Yes," repeated the other, "I am sure you can be of service to me. I wished you to speak out. I am glad you spoke out. There is nothing like being frank, Mr. Ward—in political and private life there is nothing like it. You understand that?"

"The listener bowed. It did occur to him that the speaker's own reputation for frankness was far from being above suspicion.

"Let me ask you one or two questions. You are not connected with any political party?"

"Not in any way."

"You are not on the staff of one of the newspapers?"

"Certainly not."

"Ever do anything in that line?"

"Nothing to speak of. I have contributed occasionally on social and literary topics. But everyone does that nowadays."

"You are a university man—a scholar, I believe?"

"I am afraid I can't call myself a scholar. I am a university man, if that means that I have been to a university."

"You belong to one of the professions?"

"Not in practice. I have passed two out of the three examinations for the LL.B."

"Then—excuse me, but it is a business question—how do you earn a living?"

"I have a few classes, I teach a little, I write a little. I manage to rub along."

"Good! I may tell you, Mr. Smith, did you say—no?—Ward—that I knew most of what you have just told me before you came into the room. When I got your letter I made some inquiries about you. You were right in reckoning that there is too much work here for any one man. You happened to strike the right moment. I will be glad, Mr. Ward, if you will in some measure act as my confidential secretary. You will be able to help me, if not directly at least indirectly—and perhaps directly even. There will be papers and things of that kind handed over to you. If I find I can trust you so far, I will get you to advise me upon them. I daresay you know I have a good many speeches to make. I will expect you to look up the facts and supply me with quotations. Nothing like an apt quotation, Mr. Brown—er—Ward. Burns is as good as any one else, and a line from Horace is a useful card to play with professional men. All the time you are with me you will be gaining experience. That is something to think about. Ever had any idea of entering public life yourself?"

"I am afraid I can't deny—I must admit there was a time——"

"Well, we will see. If I like you I may do

something for you. See me to-morrow at my private house. We can go into details then. What about salary? What do you say to one hundred and fifty pounds a year for a start?"

Arthur thought for a moment. Then he said, "Will you leave that open until to-morrow?"

"Certainly. On second thoughts you had better come to see me here—not at my private house. Say, ten o'clock."

A messenger's head appeared round the door, "Mr. Le Mercier to see you, sir!"

"Show him in."

A leery individual, entering with hat on the back of his head, advanced to the table and took a chair at Rayment's elbow. He was evidently quite at home. The Minister showed no surprise, and no resentment at the intrusion. Wondering, and yet not less than pleased with the result of his mission, Arthur bowed himself out of the room.

CHAPTER VI.

PURSUIT OF THE LAUREL.

“ WANT,” said the Minister, leaning forward in his office-chair, “to tell you about some very particular business, Mr. Ward.” He held his lighted cigar suspended in his left hand and looked at the man opposite even more hard and penetratingly than usual.

It was about a month after the interview narrated in the last chapter. The provisional agreement then entered into had been completed, and the chief partner was fain to confess that so far it had produced satisfactory results.

“What I was going to say will surprise you.”

The listener did not think it would. Nothing that Rayment said would be likely to surprise him. He knew his man pretty well by this time. But he merely nodded.

“I believe,” went on the other, still beating about the bush and blending his hitherto questioning manner with an element of confidence and rather heavy familiarity, “that we understand

each other. I believe I can trust you. I don't mind telling you that you have been of service to me—very considerable service."

"I am very pleased to hear you say so."

"It comes to this. Mind, what I am going to say is absolutely confidential; I haven't said it to anyone but you, and, what's more, I would not say it to anyone but you." He paused to allow this announcement to sink home.

"The fact is that this Government don't carry on for more than another week."

"How? What makes you think that?"

"Think! It is an absolute fact. The numbers are up. As soon as the House meets, Bryant will have to go."

Rayment was right after all. The news was surprising—it was little short of astounding. What extraordinary underground tactics had been going on to bring it about that an ostensible majority of nearly twenty should crumble suddenly to nothing? And—the personal question that immediately obtruded itself—what was to become of the recently created post of adviser to the Minister for Labour and Education when the present Government went out of office?

"Are you quite sure of it? It was only last week that the *Recorder* gave the rumour a flat denial, and said that Bryant could show a majority on want of confidence vote of nineteen."

"*Recorder's* an ass. I know what I am talking

about. Never mind how I know—you will find out soon enough.”

“Who is to be the new man?”

“Johansen.”

“Johansen! Why, how on earth can he form a Ministry? The country-party won’t stand him, and he can’t get a single Labour vote.”

Rayment smiled a cautious but satisfied smile. “You are both right and wrong. I see you have a fairly correct idea of what has been going on so far as it can be known by anyone who is not like myself *in medias res*, so to speak. *Magna pars fui*—I think I might venture to say that.”

At another time these tags of bad Latin might have caused a smile. But the other man was intensely anxious to know what was going to happen.

“The position is this: Bryant can’t carry on. His majority, as I said, is gone. Johansen can throw out Bryant—but Johansen can’t fill Bryant’s place. Now that’s what I call a very interesting situation.”

The slow oracular method of coming to the point was getting exasperating.

“The key to the position,” went on Rayment with solemn emphasis, “rests with your humble servant—it rests with me.”

Arthur could only look at him.

“What I want you to do is to see Johansen confidentially. Confidentially, you understand.

Tell him I have had differences with Bryant over this Education Grant business, and that I am thinking about resigning. Say I authorised you to say that. Sound him about his intentions when the House meets. Do you follow me?"

"So far."

"Now here's where the beautiful part of it comes in. Johansen doesn't know whether to move his motion next week or to wait. He knows that he can't form a Ministry without getting someone over from our side. Well, what is he to do? There's just one man who could set him on his feet. You see that man in front of you."

"Am I to understand," said Arthur, the underlying motive of all this seeming to dawn upon him, "that you want me to say—that is, that you are prepared—I mean that you would have no objection to take office under Johansen if the present Government goes out?"

The Minister smiled a sardonic smile.

"My dear fellow, you are a baby at this game. You haven't cut your teeth at it yet. You don't see more than an inch in front of your nose. Take office under Johansen! Be hanged to him. It is the last thing in the world I would be likely to do."

"Then I am in the dark as much as ever."

"See here. You must get Johansen to *think* that I will go with him. Then what happens? He moves his vote of no-confidence, turns out Bryant, goes to the Governor and asks for a dissolution. In

the present hash-up of parties it is quite certain he will get it. In the meantime I have resigned my portfolio. The next step will be the election of the new Parliament."

"I quite see that."

"Before the new Parliament meets Johansen will have come to me. I shall have to tell him that he has been labouring under a delusion, and that I can't possibly serve under him. Tableau! Down goes Johansen, and who's left on top? No one but your humble servant. No one but myself. It is a million to one, if we play our cards correctly, that it will be I—I who speak to you, Mr. Ward—who will then be sent for and asked to form the new Cabinet."

"Upon my word, sir, your foresight in these matters is amazing. It beats anything that I had ever dreamed of."

"That's all right. You will see Johansen and prime him for me. *Verbum sap.*, you know. I am sure you will do very well—the very man—you'll know what to say to him. We'll consider it settled."

"With all deference to you, sir, it isn't settled. When I entered your service I never bargained for anything like that—to lead a man to understand what isn't true—to play a crooked game—to make promises——"

"D—— it, sir, what kind of high horse is this you are riding? Don't you know that all politics are a matter of making promises? How the devil do you think this country could be carried on if we didn't

make promises? Crooked, indeed! If you weren't a very young man and too green to know any better I should speak plainer."

"Well," said Arthur, looking very white, and experiencing the sickly sensation of one who has scrambled on to what seemed a safe place and finds it giving way under him, "all that I can say is, that you had better get someone else. I am afraid there is not much more use for me here."

"Now look here, my boy," urged the Minister, changing his tone to one of large amiability, and putting into it a note of almost entreaty, "I am sure we are not going to quarrel. Take time to think of it. Come back and see me to-morrow. You know what a high opinion I have got of you. It is an opinion, I may say, that I am not alone in. My wife and daughter"—he laid a slight emphasis on the word daughter—"share it with me."

It was anything but a fair move, but the effect on the listener was stronger than he had probably anticipated.

"And I don't mind telling you"—rising from his chair and putting his hand on the other's shoulder—"that I mean to push you on. You would like to get into public life, wouldn't you? Eh? Well, if the elections take place in June or July, we can bring you out for a suburban constituency. You'll get in all right. I'll come and speak on your platform myself."

Arthur felt that he ought to kick the man who

was offering him these bribes, but he could not even speak.

"Think of what's in store for you. Politics, place, power, anything you like. You have got it in you. All that you want is a start. Doesn't the thought of it put new life into you? Crowds cheering you. Women, who wouldn't look at you now, running after you by the hundred. What a time you'd have, by George!"

The Minister grinned. If he was not thinking of certain experiences in which the present Mrs. Rayment had no part, the grin belied him.

"You needn't tell me that you don't know a pretty girl when you see one. And they are all alike—they are all to be had if you have enough to offer 'em. Or, if you prefer it, you can take your *otium cum dig.* in a mansion across the harbour, and have the University professors to dinner with you."

"I am afraid it is no use asking me to——"

"Don't decide until to-morrow. And don't be a fool. Don't think that when you are out in the world that you are in a Sunday School. I'm a religious man myself, but there is moderation in all things. Someone to see me? Show him in."

CHAPTER VII.

“CREDE EXPERTO.”

IT seemed to Arthur Ward, a couple of hours later, as he pulled a chair over to the window of his room and sat looking down upon the street, as if he had been bumped over some rough and untried country and had become a little dazed in consequence. And then again it seemed as if a by no means angelic figure had been taking him on to a mountain and giving him a view of the world often seen in dreams. The indignation that had followed the first overtures had subsided. The crude morality, or lack of morality, enunciated in Rayment's offer had astonished, if not shocked him. But after all, who was he that he should preach morality to these people or dash himself against the rocks of political custom as he had just heard it defined? If by way of protest he threw the Minister over and went out into the streets and starved, would there be any who would not laugh at him? Would there be anyone a shade better for the sacrifice? Would either the present or

the dim eternity of the future make it worth while? Enough had happened during the last few weeks to give him confidence, and to make him feel as if, after several years of more or less uncertain and wasted effort, he had at length found the groove in which Nature or Providence intended him to run. He took a genuine interest in everything relating to politics and public life. It was a world of vast promises, though at present he dwelt only on the outskirts. He knew that recent pæans of praise in the newspapers—praise of the Minister's "extraordinary capacity for work," as shown in his intimate knowledge of all the details of the Wages Board's questions; of his mastery of the principles of one of the greatest problems of the day, as evidenced in a recent speech in Parliament on Technical Education; of his exceptional firmness and self-control, as displayed in the answer to a very aggressive deputation of the unemployed—were all praises due in no slight measure to work done and advice tendered by himself. Like Macbeth, he had won golden opinions from all sorts of people. It would be very much pleasanter to wear those opinions than to have to throw them away—even with the prospect of getting a close-fitting garment of rigid self-esteem.

He got up, walked about the room, and then came back to the window.

"Five or six years ago," he muttered, "no one would have persuaded me to do this thing, and now——"

It might have been that his life during the past few years had been too introspective and too friendless. He could have made a friend of his brother, but Bertie's temperament was so entirely foreign to his own that a close companionship would only have jarred on both. But it was necessary to talk to someone. Some relief to this whirring of the mental wheels was demanded. He sat down at the table and penned a hasty note to Bertie, asking him to call round that evening. There was just time to catch the afternoon post. He went out, put the letter in a pillar-box, and slowly remounting the stairs, flung himself listlessly into the chair again.

The landlady's voice was heard below. She seemed to be expostulating with someone. A minute later there was a perfunctory knock at the door, and someone stepped inside—the same mysterious, dilapidated, shabby-genteel someone, whom he had seen before in the Minister's room. Close behind him came the landlady herself.

"Excuse me"—the man was smiling and his tone was urbanely polite—"but this good lady and I have had a slight difference of opinion as to the necessity of my coming upstairs. As, however, my message was important, I thought I would take the liberty of presenting it myself."

The intruder threw a letter on the table and stood by the mantelpiece, applying a light to a black and strong-smelling pipe. The address on

the envelope, which was marked confidential, was in Rayment's own handwriting.

"My dear Ward," the note ran, "I quite forgot this morning that I had an engagement for to-morrow, to inspect the works at the Dimboola Swamp. That means I shall be away all day, perhaps two or three days. If you have time on hand, why not go to Randwick to-morrow? My wife and daughter will be there, and would be glad if you would join their party. Will expect to see you at 10.30 on Friday morning. Yours sincerely, JOHN RAYMENT."

"Did the Minister give you this himself?"

"He did."

"And who in the name of all that is marvellous are you?" The question was not spoken, but it stared at the new comer from the other man's eyes.

"Having unfortunately left my card at home, I should have explained that my name is Le Mercier, and that I have the honour of a fairly intimate acquaintance with the distinguished gentleman who intrusted me with that letter. I think it would be correct to say, if you will pardon the somewhat vulgar expression, that we have been 'pals' for a long time."

"Ah, I am not surprised."

The man, whose manner and speech, whether natural or assumed, were those of a broken-down tragedian, bowed with unctuous politeness.

"Your lack of surprise flatters me. To tell you the truth, Mr. Ward—you see I have the honour of knowing your name—there are some people who are surprised. It is not always easy, it is sometimes distinctly difficult, to establish a mutual understanding between the successful politician and the man who is—well, not such a conspicuous success. The common herd have a habit of noticing such little things. It is only to philosophers like yourself and myself, that these outward and accidental differences—the differences, for example, between the Minister's coat and my own—become trifles of no account."

He spoke with a slightly mocking air. As he stood leaning carelessly on the mantelpiece, there was a certain grace in his reckless Bohemianism, battered and untidy as it was. Yet careless as he looked, his eyes travelled round the room taking in every detail.

"Is there anything," said Arthur after a short pause, "that I can do for you?"

"If that," smiled the new arrival, "is a polite hint that you would not be unduly disheartened by my departure, allow me to say that I do not propose to detain you. Perhaps you may find your way to Randwick to-morrow? We may have something more to say to each other there.

"I have not decided."

"Rayment tells me that his wife and daughter are going. A handsome woman that—the young one I mean."

"So I hear."

"What a woman! What a spirit! None of your cold milk-and-watery creations. None of your tame-looking, die-away beauties. Real life about her, real warmth, real fire. Sort of woman who could do anything and make you do anything. Better a brief experience of her than a lifetime of all the others. Or, if you prefer it in another way, better fifty years of Maud Rayment than a cycle of Eliza Jane, or Gwendoline, Ermyntrode, or the rest of 'em. Case of *crede experto*, I assure you."

"How in thunder—I mean what are you alluding to by your *crede experto*?"

Le Mercier laughed. "Of course, one hears things and draws conclusions. Not that it matters to you or me. As Shakespeare—or was it Bacon?—says, 'Let the galled jade wince, our withers are unwrung.' In case I have to call again, tell your excellent landlady that she needn't worry about the spoons. I haven't pocketed any of them. Good day."

And he was gone. Ward breathed more freely. The man had, somehow, absorbed all the air. The thinly veiled insolence of his tone, his manner of taking possession of the apartment, his patronising air were insufferable. Why did Rayment consort with the fellow? Why did he let him haunt his office? Why did he have him at his house? Could it be that there was any kind of justification—even the wildest justification—for the vulgar

braggadochio of his reference to Rayment's daughter? *Crede experto*—what could he mean?

Still asking himself these questions, Ward formed one resolve. He would go and see the editor of the *Recorder*. He would go that very night, whether he was to break with Rayment or not. And as the feeling of doubt and disgust grew stronger, he half decided that he would break with him. He would see the newspaper people, and perhaps get a promise of work that would, if the worst came to the worst, furnish some vantage ground for a further effort, and help to keep the wolf from the door. He did not like the *Recorder*, but he was beginning to like Rayment less.

At eight o'clock Bertie came whistling up the stairs. He seemed to be in better spirits than usual. "What's the matter," he said, "you look worried about something?"

"Do I? I don't feel worried—not now. I wanted to talk with you. Sit down. I have got to go out presently."

"So have I got to go out," the boy answered, throwing himself into a chair, "but I am not exactly pressed for time. What is it now, anyhow?"

Looking at the careless face in front of him, and remembering what he did remember, Arthur knew quite well that any confidence of the kind he was meditating could only have one result. He knew well, and he was sorry to know it, that scruples which troubled him so would not trouble

his brother in the least. Not that the latter's nature was bad. He would not, if he could have avoided it, have wantonly injured man, woman, or child. He was ready to oblige anyone always, provided it did not cost him too much trouble to do so. But as for the power to sacrifice himself to a question of abstract principle, or to withstand any protracted moral siege, it was simply not in his nature. And apparently nothing on earth could put it there.

Yet Arthur told him what was in his mind. He did not tell him everything. He mentioned no names and said nothing to indicate the precise plans of the people to be affected by the plan that had been outlined to himself. Someone was to be put on a wrong political track. Was he justified in taking any hand in the proceeding, knowing, as he did know, that treachery was engendered, and that at the same time a refusal on his part would probably mean the giving up of what looked like a prosperous career?

Bertie listened attentively to every word. "Great Scot," he commented, when the narrative was over, "there must be some clever scheming going on. It's marvellous."

"Marvellous, do you call it? It is one of the ugliest things that you or I have heard of for a long time."

"Eh? Does it strike you that way? Do you mean that you won't take on this contract, whatever it is?"

"That's about what I do mean."

Bertie looked at his brother with surprise, mingled with disappointment and ill-humour. "It's no use reasoning with you, Arthur. I don't see anything very bad, myself, in what you have told me. Seems to me politics are very much like a game of poker. If you don't bluff the other fellow he will bluff you. Anyhow, we are an unlucky family. You throw away a good chance, and I don't get a chance at all."

"Just think for a minute, Bertie. Ought we to come down to this? Is it really worth while?"

"Oh! perhaps not," said the younger brother, in the petulant tone of one who is not going to argue the point.

There was no mistaking what that tone signified.

"I would like to do this," Arthur told him, "it only for your sake. I know that if I got on with Rayment I could give you a lift, and I dare say you want it. But this is rather too much."

"That's all right." He got up as if the conversation was over. "I suppose you are not coming my way."

"Yes, I am; I am going as far as the *Recorder* office. We might as well go together."

They walked along the street in silence. Both knew it was safer to say nothing. The Englishman is wise in these matters. The foreigner and the fool will overwhelm you with words at the wrong time. An Englishman seldom does that.

"Tell me," said Arthur at last in a perfectly matter-of-fact tone of voice, "how things have been going with you lately. Financial barometer looking up at all?"

"Bad as it can be. That's nothing new. It's been like that for a long time. I have been an awful fool, simply an awful fool, but it's no use whining about it. If I can't raise four hundred pounds by the end of next week, Simpkins and Brown are going to close down on me. It means that I shall have to clear out of the country, that's all."

They had come to the *Recorder* office, and Arthur stopped. His face was very grey.

"Bertie, I know you have been foolish, but I am not blaming you. We are all fools more or less. I am very, very sorry. If I could possibly—if one hundred pounds is any use——"

"No use at all, thanks all the same. You have done quite enough for me as it is. If I have to go under, I'll go under. But there is a chance, and I meant to tell you about it before, only you started on something else."

"What do you mean?"

"Just this. It's a racing matter. Oh, I know what you think—'a silly game to begin with, and only going to the devil faster than ever.' But this *may* come off. For two months I have been watching it every day. You will be at the races to-morrow? Very well. Watch the steeplechase, and if a horse with an all-crimson jacket wins, I

"Crede Experto."

shall have won nearly five hundred pounds ; enough anyhow to keep me on my feet for a month or two."

"I don't understand. What chance is there? What made you do this in the first place?"

"If you come out to-morrow, I'll tell you all about it."

"It is the rottenest of all rotten reeds to lean on, Bertie. But"—with a look full of something warmer than sympathy, "even if it is, don't be discouraged. We'll find some other way. I have got to go in here now. If you are coming past my place at about eleven o'clock to-night, look in. I shall be up and may have something to tell you. It is just possible I may be able to tell you what our chances will be for some time to come."

With that he disappeared up the stairs.

CHAPTER VIII.

INK AND DISHONOUR.



R. JULIAN HOPKINS, mining speculator, turfite, reputed good fellow—reputed that is by the wide circle that knew him in a casual way—was not in his usual cheerful mood. He sat in the smoking-room of his house at Potville and thought over many things. There had been two or three people to dinner, but they had gone, and Hopkins was alone. His wife was in the house somewhere, but exactly where she was and what she was doing he did not know, and did not much care. He had a presumption amounting to certainty that she would be able to entertain herself without his assistance. So he sat in the smoking-room with a spirit flask and syphon bottle by his side, cigar ash liberally sprinkled over his shirt front, and an expression of unmistakable dissatisfaction on his face.

He had brought off several master strokes in his time and was meditating another. If he was

successful he would be able to pride himself on a rare feat. People who indirectly suffered by it might be inclined to call it a rare swindle. But that would not trouble Hopkins. It seemed to him rather foolish to make a fuss about words when a transaction of this kind was in question. The knowing ones would call it clever, and as for the greenhorns, they must expect to pay for their experience.

About nine months ago he had bought for little more than a song, a horse with which he had now great hopes of winning the March Steeplechase to be run only next day. The qualities of the animal were quite unexpected when the purchase was made. As it happened, the seller himself had not been aware of them. The first inkling Hopkins got of the extraordinary pace and jumping abilities of the ill-tempered brute, which he chanced to be riding, was on one occasion in August when he was following the hounds. There was a lively five-minutes' burst across country, over some stiff fences, and he discovered, after the first breathless two hundred yards, he was leaving the field as if it were standing still. With great presence of mind, and not without much difficulty, he pulled his mount back. For the remainder of the afternoon he rode quietly and thoughtfully behind the hunt.

"Upon my word, Hopkins," said an acquaintance that evening, as they were riding slowly home together, "that animal of yours put on a wonderful

spurt near the Point there. What happened to him afterwards?"

"Tell you the truth, I don't know. I couldn't hold him for a quarter of a mile, and then he seemed to shut right up."

"If he could only stay," said the other man, looking shrewdly at horse and rider. The latter's reputation for guilelessness was not exactly that of a turtle dove.

"It does seem a pity that he can't," was the colourless and unconcerned reply.

This was the rod which was being kept in pickle for the March Steeplechase, now at hand. Up to a certain point everything had gone well. The horse had been backed about a month before in all the principal cities of Australia. If Gasconader won, his owner would clear £5,000. He badly wanted the money. He had given the horse an occasional "breather" at suburban meetings, and as it had been very carefully handled by the most expert of jockeys, it had never finished closer up than the middle of the field. Consequently the wagers made by Hopkins had been made at a price that was distinctly remunerative.

One of the very few individuals who shared the owner's confidence was young Herbert Ward. With that suicidal extravagance which was driving him on to the rocks of bankruptcy and disgrace, it had been Bertie's practice to follow the hounds on any and every occasion when the opportunity presented itself.

He rode straight and fearlessly—rode as he had learnt to ride at his boyhood's home on the borders of the Otway Forest, and as he had ridden many a time in mad pranks, with the maddest of company. Hopkins, who admired straight going—in the literal, if not always, or to all appearances, in the metaphorical sense—and who had been taken by the lad's look and manner, as well as by his seat in the saddle, had invited him to his house. Bertie had made himself very agreeable. He was voted a treasure in the drawing-room, where his music and his other advantages were reputed to have caused no little gushing and sighing from feminine lips. There was, moreover, just enough man of the world about him to make him sufficiently good company for the older men who were, in a more or less intimate way, members of Hopkins' set.

Knowing something of the lad's financial affairs, and willing to do him a good turn, Hopkins had told him of the Gasconader business and of the monetary possibility connected with it. Bertie, duly grateful, had managed by some means to borrow or scrape together twenty pounds, which he had invested on the horse at the liberal odds of twenty to one.

It was Bertie whom the owner of Gasconader was awaiting now. There was a ring at the door, and in the manner of one who was quite at home, the expected visitor sauntered into the room.

"Read that," said Hopkins abruptly, tossing over a telegram which he had been gloomily rolling round his fingers.

It was caught, straightened out, glanced at, and tossed back again. It was in cypher.

"No use giving it to me. What's it all about? What does it mean?"

"It simply means," said Hopkins, "that we are done. We haven't a possible. It means"—he got up, walked to the door, and looked into the passage to see if anyone was within hearing—"it means that they have been getting at Carson, and the scoundrel is going to throw me over."

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Bertie. The blow was severe. "Do you mean that Carson won't ride Gasconader, or that he'll pull him—that he won't ride to win?"

Hopkins nodded.

"That's it. He'll ride him, or he thinks he will, anyhow. But the man who sent me that telegram has been sniffing round in Melbourne for the past fortnight, and he tells me now that he is absolutely certain Carson has been got at by the Sea King party, and that he doesn't intend to ride to win to-morrow."

"Well," said Bertie, "there isn't much time. What do you intend to do?"

"Do? What do I intend to do? I wish to heaven I knew what to do."

"Can't you get someone else?"

"No. It's too late. All the jockeys that could ride that weight or wouldn't bring him down at the first fence are engaged for to-morrow. Besides, I

couldn't trust them. The same people might get at them too."

"Well—"

"Well? What do you say 'well' like that for?"

"Why don't you put me up?"

"Put *you* up! Great heavens, man, what have you been drinking?"

Hopkins sat back and stared at the other man, amazement, incredulity, and a score of other emotions rendering him incapable of speech.

"You ride Gasconader!" he managed to get out. "Why, dash me, I never thought of such a thing. I never dreamed you had the grit to do it, anyhow."

"Thanks," said Bertie, "you are complimentary, at any rate. I may be a coward in some things, but I'm not anxious to hear anyone tell me so. And you ought to know by this time that if there is one thing in the world I can do, it is sit a horse."

"This is the stiffest race in Australia."

"Confound it, what if it is? Didn't I tell you I wasn't afraid of it? Of course, if you are not satisfied with me, you can get someone else."

"My dear boy," said the other man thickly, gratitude and astonishment combining with the whiskey he had been drinking to make his voice unsteady, "my dear boy, I admire you. I never expected it of you. I never thought—I wouldn't have suggested—"

"That's all right," retorted the lad, his face set and a shade paler than usual. "It isn't that I am

fond of this sort of thing, but if Gasconader doesn't win to-morrow I am done. Do you hear? I am done. He *must* win. It is touch and go with me, I tell you. Is it settled?"

"You have ridden him before?"

"You know I have—over all sorts of fences and in all sorts of country. You know you have often lent him to me. Carson himself doesn't know him any better than I do."

"You shall ride him. Give me your hand on it."

They shook hands. Bertie's face was still pale, but his eyes blazed.

"How is he?" he inquired.

"Gasconader? Never better. Fit to race for a man's life."

"Good! Has he been tried over the treble yet?"

"Once. He can fly it all right."

"You will tell Carson to stand down to-morrow?"

"I'll send a message to him this very night, the blackguard! Thanks to you, I feel a man again. I would have ridden the horse myself, but it was simply impossible. It would have meant more than two stone over weight. Here's good luck to-morrow."

He poured some of the whiskey into a glass, and pushed the bottle across to Bertie. The latter helped himself.

"Another?"

"No. Not another drop until this time to-morrow."

"Perhaps you had better go home and have a sleep," suggested the elder man.

"Not yet. I couldn't sleep. I promised to see some people at Mandeno's at ten o'clock. It is nearly that now. Then I am going along to my brother's. I promised to look in there before going home."

"I won't let you go alone," said Hopkins. "I'll have a cab sent round, and we'll go together."

He jumped up to leave the room and then turned back. His eyes were staring wide open. He looked, and indeed felt, like a man walking about in a dream. He went up to Bertie and took him by the shoulders.

"Am I mad," he said, "or are you? Are you going to ride to-morrow? Are we both drunk, or what?"

"You might be drunk," answered Bertie grimly, "but I was never more sober in my life. And I tell you candidly that Gasconader must win that race to-morrow, or I must put a bullet through my head five minutes afterwards. So, if I do break my neck at the treble—well, it's neck or nothing in any case."

In a couple of minutes they were bowling along the street.

* * * * *

In the meantime, Arthur had made his way up the *Recorder* stairs. What his intentions were, or how much or how little he expected from the forthcoming interview with the editor, he would not have found it easy to say. The one clear impression he had was that circumstances were driving him somewhere, and that he was doubtlessly strong enough to resist. On the one side was the Scylla of political treachery ; on the other was the Charybdis of hopeless insignificance and failure. He wanted to find some passage between the two. The newspaper, naturally, suggested itself. The guiding genius of that influential sheet could help him if he would. But would he? That was the question.

There is nothing in the world so calculated to daunt the spirits of anyone who has an appeal to make, or a favour to ask, as the iron mechanism and relentless routine of a newspaper office. Even to Arthur Ward, who was no novice, and who had been up these stairs many times before, the period of waiting was trying, almost to the point of physical exhaustion. Of course the great man was busy, and would be for some time. The very building and machinery, the very walls and roof, seemed busy and in the mood to resent any intrusion from anyone or anything that was not part of themselves.

"What kind of folly is it," he thought to himself, "to expect that this soulless thing will do anything for me, or that I will be able to do anything for it?"

It has as much humanity as a Frankenstein, and as much sentiment as a brick."

The preliminary throb of the latest modern machine—the public were assured it had been imported specially for the *Recorder* at enormous expense—beat noisily in his ears. An occasional printer's assistant, grimy-faced and full-handed, was hurrying past. The ticking of a telegraph operator came from an adjoining room. The men on the staff, reporters, contributors, editorial assistants, messengers, and occasional hands, passed in and out like automata. Sub-editors sat glued to their desks. A short, sharp command, or the shriek of a whistle communicating with an upstairs department, was heard now and again. The faces of the men at work, from chief sub-editor to printer's devil, had only one expression, and that was no expression at all. They were for the time being part of the newspaper wheel. They might be anything outside the office, but inside they were all alike. They invited no confidences, betrayed no sort of feeling, wanted no intrusion. All the time wires were throbbing incessantly, and telegraph boys were hurrying in and out. News and comments were being hastily and hotly thrown together; local sensations and events of world-wide importance were taking shape under the flying fingers of the linotyper. Throughout the whole building, pervading it from basement to ceiling, was the sense of some inexorable entity, some iron-bound, steam-

driven, all-compelling force, the life of which was infinitely more transcendent, and infinitely more lasting, than that of the human intelligence which pretended for the time being to have it under control.

And what of the man whose finger was on the pulse of this machine, the man whom the visitor was waiting to see? Like the Delphic Oracle, he was invisible, working behind a barrier. Men high in the political and commercial world were ushered into his room and ushered out again. What happened behind the green baize door, no one but the initiated ever knew. Whatever it was, they were careful not to say.

At last Arthur's turn came. The five minutes which he had been asked to wait had extended to nearly three-quarters of an hour. And in the course of that waiting his ideas had crystallised somewhat. He would make his request in a couple of sentences. He would be just as matter-of-fact as the man he had to deal with. It would be impossible to be more.

The editor laid aside the proof he was reading, put down his pen, pushed his chair back an inch or two, and looked at the intruder with the faintest gleam of recognition in his eyes. This was, to those who knew him well, his approachable manner. It meant that he was prepared to listen. It committed him to nothing. But it suggested that he was strictly impartial. A glance at the clock was also

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intended as a slight reminder that his time was limited.

"I would not trouble you now," said Arthur Ward, coming at once to the point, "were it not that you have for some months past accepted a column from me in your weekly paper. So far as that is concerned, I believe—that is, I hope—that the arrangement between us has not been unsatisfactory to you?"

The inscrutable-faced man with the greyish hair and beard nodded ever so slightly.

"I have come to ask you if that arrangement can be extended—I mean, if you can give me anything more to do."

"H'm!"

There was something in that dubious exclamation not altogether discouraging.

"You wish to do more work for us? Do you mean editorially?"

"In the humblest capacity, if you wish."

"At present we are, if anything, overmanned. But it is just possible that something may come to hand. At present"—with a glance at the clock—"I can't tell you anything. Come and see me again, say, this day week."

"Pardon me, but that will be of no use."

"Eh?"

"The fact is"—looking hard at the face in front of him, and trying to discover whether there was behind the business mask any hint of friendship or any

invitation to more than a formal confidence—"my own time for decision is very limited. The fact—but perhaps I am troubling you with unnecessary details?"

"Go on."

"For the past month or two I have been earning my livelihood by work of a semi-political character. After to-morrow that work may no longer be available, and for obvious reasons I must decide promptly what to do."

"In that case I am afraid—but stay a moment." A sudden train of thought was shaping itself behind the close eyebrows. "Perhaps we can find a way out of the difficulty. You said that you had been doing work of a semi-political character?"

"Yes."

"And, if I am not mistaken, you have been associated in that work with the Minister for Education and Labour?"

"Well"—rather hesitatingly—"to some extent, yes."

"You will understand it is necessary to ask these questions. And you possess the Minister's confidence?"

"I think I may say that I do."

"Absolutely?"

"That would be going too far."

"H'm." The face of the man in the editorial chair betrayed nothing, but there was a little more light in his eyes, as if a discovery or anticipation of

more than average importance had dawned upon him.

"Will you excuse me a moment?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Excuse me a moment; I want to speak to Mr. Sharpe. Look in again in five minutes."

Arthur left the room wonderingly. In answer to a ring the chief of the *Recorder* staff—a clean-shaven, parchment-visaged man, who might have been any age from thirty to fifty—stepped inside. The door swung behind him.

"Well," inquired the editor abruptly, "what success?"

"Practically none," answered Sharpe. "I have made enquiries and sounded about twenty members, Government and Opposition, but none of them will say a word. There are only rumours. But from what I can gather, I think this is certain: the Government will be out before another couple of weeks are over."

"You could find nothing out about Rayment?"

"Nothing to go upon."

"Not whether he is going to throw over Bryant?"

"Impossible to say."

"Ah! that's a pity."

"But I do know this: the man in his confidence, and the man who could tell us everything if he liked, is that new private secretary, or whatever he calls himself, Ward. He was with Rayment privately for over an hour this morning. I heard that from Le Mercier."

"Le Mercier! You mean the man who calls himself an organiser of the unemployed?"

"That's the man. I know he is a confirmed loafer and liar, but I believe he is telling the truth in this instance."

"You think this Ward knows all about it?"

"Yes, I do."

"That will do for the present, Mr. Sharpe. Ask the gentleman outside to come in."

Again Arthur entered the editorial sanctum. To his astonishment there was a smile, evidently meant to be encouraging, playing round the set impassive features. Was he dreaming, or was the autocrat of the mammoth journal actually apologising for having detained him so long?

"Of course, Mr. Ward, you will understand that anything I do will have to be ratified finally by my directors."

The listener bowed. He knew this was a cautious formula intended to leave the door open for a change of plans, if thought desirable. As a matter of fact, the idea of interfering with any scheme of the editor's never entered the directors' heads.

"As it happens, you are come at an opportune time. You can tell us just what we want to know. In regard to the political situation now"—he paused and favoured the other man with a searching glance—"I believe there is a crisis approaching?"

"The remark was made interrogatively, but there was no reply. Arthur was beginning to have a

vague idea as to what was coming. Somehow or other, he felt he had stumbled into another *cul de sac*.

"You can tell us about the rumoured split in the Ministry, and the part that Mr. Rayment intends to play in it. In view of the intense interest felt by the public in this matter, and the fact, which I don't mind admitting, that it is extremely difficult to get information, I am prepared to offer you ten pounds for a short article. A strictly informative and reliable article, mind."

"You mean"—inquired Arthur stammering, conscious of a noise like singing in his ears—"you wish——"

"Yes. You can tell us what we want to know. And for the future, Mr. Ward, I will see that you get work with us that will mean from two hundred pounds to three hundred pounds to begin with. I think that's all." The tone implied that the interview was over, "You might let me have that article to-night. It is too important to hold over."

So that was it. That was what was required. It seemed certain now that one of two alternatives must be correct. It seemed there must be something in his look, or manner, or voice, or past history—he did not know what, but there must be something—that made these men with important schemes on hand regard him as their natural tool. Either that, or the cold brutal truth must be that ideals of straightforward conduct and honourable dealing were in journalism and politics so much lumber that had to be thrown

relentlessly overboard. It might be that his own experience was unfortunate—no doubt it was—but such was the conclusion that had now taken possession of him, and that decided what he was about to say.

Thought is swifter than the electric current, and with no noticeable pause he was ready with a reply.

“I regret, sir, that I shall not be able to let you have the article to-night, or, for that matter, any other night.”

“What?”

“I regret that I am unable to accept your offer. I regret for many reasons. But if I had Mr. Rayment’s confidence—which I never admitted—I would not break it for ten pounds or two hundred pounds. If I must break faith with someone, and it seems it has come to that, it won’t be with the man who took me up in the first place and gave me the first chance I ever had. But I am sorry—if this is the last word you are likely to listen to from me, I will say it—I am sick and sorry to think that a man in your position, a man immensely rich and powerful, should tempt or even allow other men to cheat and lie and swindle for your benefit, when they know, poor devils, that the only alternative is for them to go into the street. As for me, I accept, if it must be so, the alternative. For the moment—I hope it will only be for the moment—I go out into the street.”

The baize door shut, and, to the man on the outer side of it, it shut out a world.

CHAPTER IX.

THE OPEN HEATH.

VERYONE who has any wish to understand Australian life in its social, and even in its serious aspect, must spend at least one afternoon at the races. He is lucky if the spirit of the scene does not get possession of him and compel him to come again. For here national beauty and national ugliness, national virtues and national vices, are strangely and inexplicably, and yet attractively blended. The great god Chance is invariably the presiding genius of the scene, though many other minor deities set up their altars, and come and play their parts, at each recurrent festival.

Brilliant, animated, and gay with contrasted colours, was the scene on the morning after the events related in the last chapter. Men were there in thousands. In the jargon of the society-writer "the gather was a fashionable one." The phrase means that there were a large number of women present. Where they are not, the fashions are not. On the race-course many distinctions are obliterated, but

there are some that remain. Men for the most part become all alike. The baronet can and does talk confidentially with the bookmaker's clerk ; and the bookmaker's clerk, whatever snobbery may be ingrained in his little soul, does not—while the contest for the spoils is going on—care two individual straws for the baronet. But women are not alike. They will never admit that they are alike. Even the race-course, with all its levelling tendencies, cannot bring them together. Fashion divides them ; reputation divides them. And there are always the two great classes—the women who feel they are women of importance, and the women who are regarded by the other women as persons who are not.

Arthur Ward, who had arrived rather late, took his seat on one of the stands, and with a curious sense of aloofness and impersonality watched the currents of humanity ebb and flow. The presence of a crowd, particularly if it is a well-dressed, pleasure-loving, buoyant-looking crowd, has on most natures the effect both of a tonic and an anodyne. Its collective brightness and brilliancy, its indifference and lack of introspectiveness must, if they do not actually repel or stifle, communicate themselves to the individual who comes within reach. The result is a deadening of self-consciousness, the forgetting of that which, an hour before, had seemed to fill the mental horizon. On the principle that the whole is greater than its component parts, is not the crowd greater than its constituent atoms?

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And being greater, is it not wider? The individual believes that so many things matter. The crowd knows that so few things make any difference. It knows there is one goal worth striving for—pleasure; that there are two apples worth chasing—the joy of the sense and the delight of the eye.

The band struck up a joyous refrain, and the whole scene had its setting. The stands, the lawns, the roses, the ivy, the carnations, and the people, all were swathed and caressed by waves of music that seemed to be echoing the message of the mild autumn sun. It was for the time being a lulling atmosphere, relieved by strains of melody, and as yet unbroken by harsh or discordant notes. Below the surface the fever of speculation slumbered uneasily, waiting for the near approach of the next race to rise to sudden life and vigour. From a corner of the enclosure the babel of the ringmen's voices came in a subdued murmur. During this, the long interval before the chief event of the day, the course and its surroundings looked at their holiday best.

On one occupant of the stand, at any rate, the social influences of the day had their full effect. The troubled experiences of the previous twenty-four hours were forgotten. He had always been too prone to meet troubles half-way. What needless unpleasantness this had often caused him. How liable a man was at such times to forget the infinite possibilities of life and health and youth—and other people. With the thought of "other people"

his eyes rested on the procession of sunshades, on the swaying forms, on the bewilderingly coloured dresses, on the rounded faces and laughing lips that made the stretch of green lawn a mirthful and a living thing. What is it that they have learned or forgotten, these women of the South—what have they forgotten of Jane Austen's primness, or St. Agnes' coldness? what have they learnt of the Spanish subtlety, or the arts of Helen of Troy? Certain it is that what they lack in austerity or reposeful manner they have more than made up in power of seductive appeal.

Two among many—typical figures, and yet individually worthy of attention, and seeming to expect it—were the politician's daughter, Maud Rayment, and her companion of the day, Geoffrey O'Brien. That the former should have been the object of many glances, admiring, curious or envious, was not remarkable. In her day she was one of the best known and best discussed women in Sydney; and even now, though a little past her physical best, men would turn round and look at her with that look which, according to a well-known dictum, is perfectly justifiable, and even expected, when the face and figure are of a kind to challenge remark. The girl's dress, which was as striking as the limits of accepted taste would permit; her look, which was frank, and even bold in its self-confident greeting to friends and acquaintances; the contour of her smiling face, and the outline of her well-moulded form—all seemed to be proclaiming

the fact that she was part of the day's pageant and was perfectly willing that people should know it. As for O'Brien, stolidly satisfied, and perfectly aware that his partner was setting him off to the best advantage, he walked up and down the lawn with a jaunty self-possession that nothing less than an electric shock would have ruffled or diminished.

To Arthur Ward, inclined to forget himself as he sat listening to the music and watching the crowd, the sight of the two brought a sudden remembrance and a sudden chill. An imperceptible shadow seemed to have stolen over the scene and to have taken some of the interest out of a picture that had, a moment before, been full of life and meaning. Reason has no part in a mental vision of this kind. It needed no philosopher to tell Ward that the woman out there on the lawn was one never likely to bring anything more satisfying than storm and unrest to himself—or, for that matter, to anyone else coming under her influence. He firmly believed this already. And yet her nearness and the sight of her flaunting herself apparently without a care or a regret in the company of O'Brien made him sick with a sense of aloofness and rejection and unsatisfied ambition. For some minutes, in spite of reason, that feeling would not pass.

He was recalled to himself, and to the memory of his primary purpose in coming to the course, by hearing two men talking on the seat beside him. Both were very much in earnest. One was an

apparently affluent person, with a florid complexion, a resplendent waistcoat and tie to match ; the other had the generic appearance of the individual usually described as "a sporting character." His trousers were tight, the rest of his dress was nondescript, and his whiskers were sandy.

"Well," said the former interrogatively, "notice anything?"

The sandy-whiskered one nodded.

"There wasn't much light, but I made him out all right."

"Who?"

"Gasconader. Did a preliminary over the big fences. Remarkable!"

"Sure it was Gasconader?"

"Certain. And," the speaker took a look round the stand and lowered his voice, "they're putting a new man up on him."

"Whew! Evidently got wind about Carson. Know who the new man is?"

"No; but 'e must be no mug at the game, or 'e wouldn't be given the contract—you can bet on that."

"The devil!"

"It is the devil."

"And you think——"

"I'm positive whatever beats 'im 'll about win. Never saw a hoss fly the big fences as he flew 'em that morning."

The man in the gorgeous waistcoat said something

in a whisper, and the other nodded, and then they rose up and went down the steps.

Ward had only caught a portion of this dialogue and its significance—if it had any significance—did not occur to him. But he was reminded that the big race of the day was approaching, and that he had not yet found his brother. He would make another attempt.

When at last he discovered him he was talking to two people—a man and a woman—the latter young, the former elderly, perhaps a relative. Just for the moment Arthur did not recognise either of them.

If he had been on the way to his own execution, and the cart had taken him past a pretty woman, Bertie would have insisted on calling a halt, and on exchanging a few words with her before going on.

The sight of his brother recalled him immediately. He raised his hat in hurried farewell, and took Arthur by the arm.

“Can’t think,” he said musingly, as if one subject and only one were in his thoughts, “when I’ve been so taken with a face as I am with that one. You remember that afternoon at the Mountains—she was talking to you when I came in. A shy little beggar—she won’t say much. But”—suddenly catching a glimpse of the clock over the committee-room, and assuming with almost startling rapidity an entirely different manner and tone—“I’ve only got a few minutes left. Hurry up! This way.” He

half pushed, half dragged his brother through the crowd.

"In here."

The man at the gate opened it in answer to an impatient sign. It closed sharply, and in a couple of seconds they were in a dressing-room with the words, "Gentlemen riders only" over the door.

"What on earth—how, Bertie! Tell me what on earth does this mean?"

"Only that I am going to ride in the Steeple," said the boy, rapidly throwing off his boots, and diving his hand into a canvas bag; "that's all."

"Good Lord!"

If a thunder-bolt had suddenly fallen at his feet, Arthur Ward could not have looked or felt more surprised.

"It seems to surprise you," throwing off coat, waistcoat, and shirt, in quick succession, and reaching for a bright-coloured silk jacket which was hanging on the wall—"but it's all settled. You know what I told you last night? Well, the man who was to have ridden for us was got at—bribed to chuck us over, the dog! There was no one else"—still rummaging with the jacket and the other things—"so here I am—going to ride myself. No other way out of it, Arthur—no other."

The elder brother, still unable to find anything to say, leaned up against the wall.

"If you want to know anything more about it," said Bertie grimly, again rummaging in the canvas

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bag, "ask Hopkins. He'll tell you. This must be he now."

The door opened and Hopkins came in. He looked flushed and excited. A cigarette that had gone out, and that he had forgotten to relight, was between his lips.

With the entrance of the new-comer, Arthur found his voice.

"Would you kindly tell me," he demanded, "whether this is your doing, Mr. Hopkins? Can't you run horses without my brother here to ride them? Can't you do your own——?"

"Shut up," Bertie broke in. "It's nothing of that kind. It's my own business. There's nothing more to be said about it."

Hopkins had some decent instinct, and showed no resentment at the tone in which he had been addressed.

"I assure you, Mr. Ward, it wasn't my wish that your brother should ride. I am as sorry in one way as you are. I'd scratch the horse this minute if I thought——"

"You'd do nothing of the sort," shouted the boy impatiently—he was now fully dressed from cap to spurs—"you know you would be disgraced for ever if you did. The bell will be going in a minute. Give me a cigarette."

"Some brandy?" said Hopkins, taking a flask from his pocket.

"Just a spoonful. How many starters are there?"

"Thirteen."

"The devil's number!" The words came involuntarily from the lips of the elder brother.

The younger one laughed—a short, hard laugh, with a ring of defiance in it.

"I don't care if there were thirteen devils. I'm strung right up, I tell you."

This was true. He was strung up to an unnatural pitch.

"The horse is all right; I've ridden him before. If I win, I win. And if I lose—just another spoonful—d—— it, I can't lose. Or if I do"—he muttered the last words to himself—"that will be the end."

An official put his head in at the door.

"All right," said the amateur rider. "You can go out this door"—turning to Hopkins and his brother—"it is the shortest way out for you."

"We will see you again," said Hopkins, with an attempt at cheerfulness, and a shaking hand, as he applied a match to his cigarette—"after the race."

"After the race," echoed the boy. "I won't say good-bye. There it goes." The bell rang, and he disappeared.

The other two passed out through the door he had indicated, and found themselves again on the course. If the scene had been animated before, it was ten times more animated now. From the slight elevation immediately in front of the stand, there could be made out a cloud of smoke in the distance,

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showing where the suburban train was making its way inland. The peaceful effect of the vanishing and reappearing cloud harmonized well with the hazy sky and soft landscape—a landscape marked in the middle distance by undulating open spaces, with here and there a house and garden plot. Further afield, and almost indistinguishable, was the faint uncertain line of the sea.

* * * * *

O'Brien and Miss Rayment had taken their seats in the stand. The latter glanced round with a woman's curiosity to see who of her friends were in the vicinity. Her eyes first fell on Barraclough. There he was in philosophic mood—apparently unmoved by the hum, and bustle, and excitement of the surging crowd below. His reverie was disturbed by a cordial greeting from a well-known lady friend—nothing more—who had just come on to the stand and had seated herself beside him in the only vacant place. It was Mrs. Harper. She glanced uncomfortably across to her gorgeous friend, Maud Rayment. Her look seemed to say "I could a tale unfold." Then she turned away her gaze, forgot her pity for O'Brien, and listened with pleasurable excitement to the Babel below.

Suddenly a momentary hush fell on the crowd. Who is the young man, with white lips, mounted on Gasconader? All eyes are now upon the jockey in the crimson jacket.

"That's not Carson up," muttered O'Brien to his companion. "Can't make out who it is. Don't remember seeing him before." He looked at one of the boards near the betting ring. "Ward! Who's Ward, anyhow?"

The voices of the metalicians rose again.

"Five to one, bar one. Five to one, bar one. Three to one Sea King. Ten to one Gasconader!"

"Ha!" exclaimed Geoffrey. "That's more like it. Someone must have backed him. Looks fit enough, anyhow."

Miss Rayment stifled a yawn behind her fan.

"You appear to be very much absorbed," she remarked.

"If I thought I wouldn't lose my place," said O'Brien, "I would go and put a pony on Gasconader."

"Why?"

"Because his backers are going to have a run for their money. It's going to be a straight go after all."

The roar of Israelitish voices sounded louder than ever.

"Four to one the field. Four to one the fee—ld. Eight to one Gasconader."

"There," said O'Brien, "it will be a shorter price yet. One minute—I'll be back in one minute."

With quite unusual speed he dashed down the steps, the crowd making way on either side.

"I couldn't understand," said Mrs. Harper to

Barraclough, "when I came to this country first why so many people—clever people, and people who had other things to do, couldn't keep away from the races."

"Do you understand now?"

"Well, I rather"—she pronounced the "a" in rather as Pope's generation pronounced the vowel sound in "tea"—"think I do. The men a-re all trying to make money, and the women are anxious to show off their frocks."

"But I'm not trying to make any money, and I haven't any frocks."

"Why do you come here?" she questioned.

"Hard to say; perhaps a kind of gregarious instinct we can't explain."

"You never bet?"

"Hardly ever. But it is interesting to watch the people. You find it so, don't you?"

"One gets plenty of amusement out of that, and sentiment, too, sometimes."

There is no moment—not even the moment of waiting, which seemed like a lifetime—but has its end. The onlookers felt rather than saw or heard that the race had begun. There was the usual gasp and shout, the usual flashing of colours in the distance, the usual hushed and strained expectation—strained to the point of almost unbearable tension until the moment when the flying squadron should have reached the straight, and have risen at the first obstacle of the three in front of the stand.

The crowd, as a crowd, had watched many steeple-chases before, and had become fairly inured to the spectacle. It had seen men thrown, lives lost, and horses killed. It had watched the sight not without anxiety, but with a certain excitement and pleasure. Yet it would have been composed not of men and women, but machines, if it had not felt a collective throb at that moment. To one man, still sitting apart and silent, the utterly unreasonable thought would occur that if anything happened to his brother he would be to blame. Somehow he ought to have prevented this thing from happening. That was his duty. But how? how?

"Oh!" another gasp, another shout, and then a cheer as every horse landed sheer of the first fence. In the middle of the compact field, a crimson jacket was discernible. A tremendous rush, and a rapping of timber, and twelve horses were over the treble, while one had fallen heavily, and a rider had been shot out of the saddle and lay still.

That most trying of all moments was over. O'Brien, who had managed to regain his seat, near Miss Rayment, and whose money was at stake, gave something between a gasp and a grunt of satisfaction. He had caught a glimpse of a rider sitting close and hard and unmoved; a glimpse also of a raking bay horse that was making no mistake, and so far had not touched a fence or stone wall. He smiled, and remarked to his companion that the man who had been thrown was getting on his feet again.

The first round was compassed without further accident. Something in a white, silvery jacket was leading. It piloted the way on the long journey round the back, and was first to reach the treble for the second time. At the last jump of the three it struck heavily and went down amid a yell of excitement and dismay. Half a score horses and riders thundering behind were on the brink of disaster. The big bay, hard on the heels of the fallen man and horse, was seen to stumble, and the crimson jacket dipped. Again, there was the gasp of mingled excitement and alarm, but in another moment a cheer with a genuine ring in it proclaimed that horse and rider had made a splendid recovery, and the now diminished field entered the last round—for home.

Maud Rayment, who had never taken her eyes off the race till now, leaned back in her seat.

“I can’t watch it,” she said, “any more.”

But it was nearly over. At the back of the course, about half a mile from home, the green jacket of an outsider was leading. The last jump but one was cleared, and he was still leading. A little further, and places had changed. The field had strung out. The crimson and green were abreast. The favourite and a grey horse were a couple of lengths behind.

It was a great race—they said afterwards—and a race full of sensations, particularly in the final stages. Another shout, and one of the leaders—was it the crimson or the green?—had hit the last fence and turned a somersault. Thank God! It was the

green. The red jacket was there still. It was first in the straight, and everything seemed over.

But the favourite, patiently handled, was not done with. He settled down to catch the leader in the run home, and hard behind him thundered the grey horse Jay Rye. A hundred yards from home the favourite had drawn level. The amateur called again on his mount. The odds might be on the professional, but there was no doubt that the boy had more than justified his place in the saddle that day.

"Dead heat!" was roared from stands and flat, while the victory of either horse was acclaimed by its supporters. "Dead heat!"—the shouts were repeated and re-echoed while the horses were a hundred yards past the post.

O'Brien put down his field-glasses with much deliberation. From his post of vantage he could see better than the crowd what had happened.

"We were beaten," he remarked to the girl beside him, "by about half a head! Yes, there are the numbers."

CHAPTER X.

LAUGHING LIPS.

IN sharp contrast to the blare and turmoil of the race-course, to the furious rush of people into overcrowded trains and tram-cars, to the fierce flutter and agitation of the streets, was the all-pervading calm which brooded over the further side of the harbour, whose waters kissed the feet of the great city. The brightness of the autumn day was over. The restlessness and the anxieties that the day had brought with it were over. In their place was something different, something better. There was now the mildness of evening, the touch of coolness in the air, the gleam of gold and purple where the sun was about to set. And it was not yet night. The day was going out smiling, and the night was coming forward with a caress.

The house in which John Rayment lived attracted attention the more from the commanding nature of its situation, and its agreeable surroundings, than from anything remarkable or ostentatious in its size and workmanship. A two-storied, roomily built

structure, with a red French-tiled roof and wide balconies, it was encircled by trees and lawny patches, with a sloping stretch of ground in front of it, leading down to the sea. The house was a few hundred feet above the level of the harbour, which it overlooked. The ferry-boats ran to within a few yards of the steps at the edge of the lawn, and through the wide-opened windows of a morning or afternoon could be seen the green luxuriance of tropical palms, contrasting with the blaze of oleanders and garden roses. But at this time of the day there was only the dusk red of sunset, against which the outline of tree and shrub showed dark and indistinct.

It needed a strain of music to harmonize the night and the landscape; and from one of the rooms of the house that harmonizing strain floated out into the garden and died on the evening air. It was a large room, and had but three occupants—two women and a man. It was not surprising that the woman at the piano should be Maud Rayment. She spent much of her time there, and her playing was recognised as above the average. Neither was it extraordinary, considering the relation between her and the politician, that the listener, sitting there in the shadow, should have been Arthur Ward. But to the man, at any rate, it did seem a coincidence that the singer, a girl with a velvety contralto voice, should be the girl his brother had been talking to, in those last anxious moments before

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the race, the girl he recalled as having helped to relieve his own solitude one rainy day when last he was staying up at the mountains. What was she doing here? And where had she got that voice?

It might have been a much worse song and a much less interesting singer, and yet the effect on Ward would have been considerable. In the first place, his nerves required a sedative after the agitation of a few hours ago, and here the want was being supplied in the most pleasant surroundings, in the most agreeable way. In the second place, he needed some outside influence—if of a flattering character so much the better—to remove or deaden the sense of disappointment and broken self-esteem, which more than one event of recent date had helped to bring about. As it happened, there were two women; one of them well known and widely desired, both of them capable of appealing to eye and sense and brain, waiting and ready to do him honour. He was the only listener, and it might be argued that the music was primarily for his benefit. The flame of life leaped up again, gratified and insurgent, though self-retained.

The delicate flattery of the situation did, indeed, appeal to the man strongly. Musing there while the shadow grew deeper, and the figure at the piano became hardly discernible, he seemed in some fashion to get a firmer, truer grasp of his own emotionable, unstable character, and of the philosophy of living. The crush and struggle on the race-course seemed

petty and meaningless when looked back upon now. But was there anything on earth of which the same would not be thought or said? There might be no reason or logic in allowing oneself to be worked up into a fever over a mock battle on a pleasure ground. But if it came to that, what was the logic or reason of anything? Where was the logical justification for spending a lifetime in the stringing together of loud sounding phrases, and calling oneself a politician? Or in laboriously heaping up sentences, and calling oneself an author? What did it matter anyhow? The struggle on the race-course had been a genuine enough struggle while it lasted. And, like a great many other things that had at one time seemed worth while, it was over.

The lamps were lit, and with a word to Miss Rayment and a backward, half-apologetic glance of farewell to the man in the corner of the room, the girl had gone. It was really extraordinary, but just for the moment he experienced a slight sensation of disappointment. Even the prospect of some minutes alone with the other woman—a prospect which had the power to dazzle a few hours ago—did not prevent something like a tinge of regret as the song ceased, and as the figure glided out of the room. But the feeling died almost as soon as it was born. There was no trace of it left when Maud Rayment got up from the piano and threw herself into a chair beside him, with an easy confidence of manner and an inviting smile on her lips.

"Haven't you anything to say to me before the others come down?"

This seemed like a request to have the shutters of silence and conversational reserve taken away. It could only be accepted by a man of ordinarily quick perception as an invitation, if not to combat *à outrance*, at least to a sentimental passage at arms. And the offer was tempting, even though the dangers were apparent.

While he hesitated, hardly knowing where to begin, she led the way on to strictly neutral ground.

"What happened to you after the race?" she inquired. "If I hadn't noticed you when the crowd was going downstairs—you sitting there with that picturesque look of gloom on your face—well, I suppose, I shouldn't have seen you out here this evening. Do you know what you reminded me of amongst all those others? A stormy petrel among a lot of tame pigeons; or, if you like it better, I'll say a Moorish Prince among a lot of orthodox Christians."

"Really," murmured Ward, meeting her confident look with one of equal assurance, "you flatter me far too much. As for being a Moorish or any other sort of prince, I am now, and always have been, so long as I can remember, a mere helpless captive in the hands of the Philistines. Generally speaking, I'm bound hand and foot; I'm blown this way and that way—at the present time I'm being blown your way—in a storm."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, looking at him incredulously, but with some interest.

"If I were to try and find a comparison for you now——"

"Do," she entreated.

"This afternoon, seeing you out there, I might have said you were the Roman Faustina. You looked as if you didn't care. Horses or men, gladiators or lions, it would have been all the same to you. You could have smiled serenely—with that beautiful imperial smile of yours—at all of them. But now—to-night——"

"To-night," she echoed.

"I don't know. I can't say. I only know that I owe you a debt of gratitude. The light throws a half-shadow on your face, and your dress matches the colour of your hair. You have the art of making people forget."

Her laugh cleared the air, which was beginning to get heavy with the pervading sense of the personal equation.

"It was a lovely day—quite exciting too. All the way home Mr. O'Brien would keep talking about the race, and about that horse that didn't win—Gaston—Gascoigne—what was its name? He said it was an amateur that rode him, and he rode such a good race that some of his—Mr. O'Brien's you know—some of Mr. O'Brien's friends were going to get up a subscription for him."

"Ah!" exclaimed Ward with a sudden start

and a sudden recollection. "He said that, did he?"

"Yes, and he said that he wouldn't mind giving ten pounds or so himself, just to encourage a man that would do that kind of thing. What do you think?"

"What do I think?" repeated Arthur, with a chill remembrance and a chill feeling of remorse; "that's just it; I don't quite know what to think."

Would it not have been a better and more unselfish thing to have stayed with Bertie—whom he had left getting into a cab outside the race-course gates—than to have so readily accepted the invitation of this woman to call at her father's house?

"Never mind," said the girl brightly, "it's not a matter that concerns you and me. Let us talk about something else; about ourselves, for example."

"And yet he's my brother," said Arthur moodily. "That's a fact I can't altogether forget."

"Your brother? Who? What do you mean?"

Ward looked at her as if surprised.

"Of course," he said, "I am forgetting. You didn't know. There was no need to have mentioned it. Still it was my brother who rode Gasconader; and I'm sorry for his sake he didn't win. Going from bad to worse, I'm afraid. No need to talk about it though—I had forgotten for the moment."

"How strange!" she exclaimed. "How remarkable! If I had only known. But," with a sudden change of manner, "you needn't trouble about it.

They are all praising him ; he's quite a hero. If he were my brother I would be very proud of him."

The listener's brow cleared. The momentary cloud lifted, and the original interest in the woman, and the pleasure of being there with her, revived.

"Yes," he assented, "I think he did better than most men would have done in the circumstances. I hope it will come out all right. But this doesn't interest you ; I'm afraid you're having a very dull evening now—now your friend the singer has gone."

"You mustn't go making love to her," said Maud Rayment, shaking her head at him. "She's only a country girl ; and I've warned her against clever men in the city like—like you, for instance."

It was Ward's turn to laugh. Then he turned round on her abruptly.

"Don't you think it would be a good idea if someone would warn a few of the men against some clever women, who shall be nameless?"

The girl looked at him with an expression of perfect frankness and innocence.

"Clever women," she repeated, "who are they? What are they? I don't know any woman who really wants to be clever ! There are so many other things better worth while. Now *you* are different. I hear them talking about you ; they say you are going to do great things."

It was more tactful to say "they" than to mention her father. The latter's name might have given the

listener cause to remember that he was not financially independent.

Ward was pleased, and his look showed it. After all, he was still very young. But he said nothing.

"Are you," she asked the question gently, even solicitously, "in low spirits to-night?"

"Not in the least—I never felt better. I have any number of schemes and plans that may, or may not, come to something. To-night, at any rate, I believe they will."

"Ah! that has the true ring of the olden time."

It was spoken in all sincerity, but his self-consciousness took alarm.

"The ring of the modern Don Quixote, you mean? There is one thing about you that I have always recognised. You have the saving sense of humour. And you have plenty of people to practise on—to keep you in form."

"I don't understand you," replied the girl.

"I should say you have been playing a lot of lawn tennis lately. I have never yet seen you knock a ball into the net."

"Why do you talk in that way?"

"Why do you play with people as if they were tennis balls?"

"Really," with a look that was rather mystifying, "I had better bring mother in to talk to you."

Without looking back, she left the room.

It occurred to him that he had better go. And then it seemed that such a course would be foolish

and unnecessary. She could think what she liked ; it was he who had the most cause for complaint. Had she not been throwing out inducements to him to forget himself, and then be sorry perhaps for years afterwards ? She knew her own powers—must know them. Why did she want to practise them on him ?

She seemed to be away a long time. When she came back it was with Mrs. Rayment and Mrs. Harper. The latter had come in quietly, and exercising the privilege of an old friend, had run up to the private room of her hostess. The three entered the drawing-room now with much rustling of silk and graciousness of demeanour. Miss Rayment, bright and self-possessed, with no trace of either former coquetry or later resentment in her manner ; her mother fair and smooth-faced, and dressed in black ; Mrs. Harper also in black, and with hair parted in the middle, American fashion. Mrs. Rayment advanced to the male occupant of the room, and feared he had spent a very uninteresting evening.

He had barely time to murmur a negative, when there was a ring at the door bell, and with much swagger and ostentatious high spirits, Geoffrey O'Brien, accompanied by two friends, station-owners and reputedly wealthy men from the western district, was ushered into the room. They had all been to the theatre, but had all left early. O'Brien had insisted on bringing the other two men with him,

and as they were acquainted with Rayment and Rayment's daughter, they had not demurred.

"How do?"—this to Arthur, after the usual greetings to the others—"How do, Ward?"—nodding across the room with patronising geniality—"didn't see you after the race this afternoon. Hope you came out of it all right. Lost a little myself, but nothing to speak of. Had a word with your brother—great crowd around him—rode a dashed good race, and a plucky race too, but brought the horse out a bit too early, I thought, otherwise would have won. A d——, eh, a dashed good race it was. I'm sure Mrs. Harper will agree with me."

The lady hardly seemed to appreciate this appeal.

"How did you like the play?" she asked.

O'Brien didn't like it much. Thought it was rather slow. Couldn't sit it out, anyhow. That was why he had taken a run across before turning in.

Miss Rayment in the meantime had engaged one of the station-owners in conversation, and her mother had hoped the visitors would make themselves at home. They knew where to find the billiard-room if they would like a game.

"Aw! delighted," murmured the disengaged squatter, looking across at his companion, who was deep in conversation with the daughter of the house. "What do you say, Rutherford? Miss Rayment will excuse us, I'm sure."

"I'll come and mark for you," said Mrs. Harper.

They expressed their thanks. Rutherford went away unwillingly. He would not have gone at all, but he had gathered from certain hints—he did not know how much or how little was in them—that it might be the correct thing to leave O'Brien and the girl together.

Arthur Ward rose, and murmured something about the necessity of getting back to town.

"I will see you as far as the steps," said the girl, springing up. "No, it's all right, mother, I don't want a shawl ; I'll be back in one minute."

He protested that it was not necessary. But when he found himself on the gravel walk, she was beside him. It was starlight, but there was no moon, and it was not easy to see where the path ended and lawn and shrub began. In front, through an opening in the trees, there was visible a brilliant streak of light, showing where a ferry-boat was pushing off from the opposite shore.

"There ought to be another light here," was her comment.

They passed the first fringe of trees, descended the steps that divided the upper from the lower part of the garden, and with the aid of the distantly illumined harbour, could see each other's faces.

"This path," indicating the one they were on, "will lead you through a gate right down to the jetty."

"I can only thank you again, and say good night."

“Good night.”

There are several hundred ways of saying good night. The words may mean anything from a curt dismissal to a direct invitation to stay. Miss Rayment's good night was neither the one nor the other. Rightly interpreted it was a challenge.

The man felt that he was not being dismissed. Evidently she did not want to quarrel with him.

“Tell me,” he asked, “did I offend you just now—when you went away so suddenly?”

“I thought I had offended you—that you thought badly of me.”

“You need never have thought that.”

“Why are you leaving so early? Geoffrey and those other men will be there for hours yet.”

“Isn't it better to go now than stay too long?”

“There are some people who as you know could never stay too long.”

It was a reckless, rather melodramatic thing to do, but then she had half—perhaps more than half—invited it. He put his arm around her, and she did not attempt to free herself, but looked up with unclouded face.

It was a foolish, dangerous thing to do, though perhaps not so dangerous as, in his hopes and fears, he might have imagined. Certainly there was a warm, sensuous, all-pervading charm about the woman leaning on his arm and looking up at him with eyes shining through the dark. To kiss her was to run the risk of not being able to forget.

It didn't seem to him at that moment—though it did afterwards—that she might be merely toying with a sensation that he was ready to find overwhelming.

"If for the last time," he said, "Good night."

"Why did you say for the last time?"

"What else is there possible—now I have forgotten myself and offended you?"

She raised her head quickly. There was a disclaimer on her lips, but it was never uttered; and as he watched her he thought even in that uncertain light that a tremor came over her face. Her eyes were fixed on something over his shoulder.

Turning round, he could at first see nothing. Then he made out the figure of a man with a slouch hat walking along the edge of the water towards the jetty. He had just passed under the light that marked the approach of the woodwork. And something in the walk—it was impossible to see the face—proclaimed the identity of Le Mercier. Strangely interested, and with a curious feeling at his heart, Arthur watched the man get into a small boat that was moored close to the jetty and pull away into the darkness.

The girl was now smiling.

"What a fright I got. I expect it was only one of the watermen who live near the point. But they look so much like murderers, creeping about there in the dark."

For answer he stood away from her.

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"I would like to think of you always as I think of you now."

"Come and see me again. Come soon. I shall be at home Friday—in the afternoon."

He demurred a little.

"For what purpose? Better tell me to go now before I have looked at you too long and become blind."

"Didn't I tell you once before that I wasn't a Gorgon?"

"But you might be Diana. You know what happened to Actæon?"

"Well!" with a look that said more than words. "I don't think anyone has ever compared me with her."

"What part will you play then?"

"I can't tell you now. Ask me that question again. Ask me on Friday. I will be expecting you. Good-bye!"

There was nothing for it but to walk on to the jetty and wait till the ferry-boat came along.

CHAPTER XI.

LE MERCIER.



LE MERCIER adjusted his tie—it was not often that he wore one—in front of the square six inches of looking-glass.

“Whichever way you look at it,” he muttered to himself, “it is a funny game.”

If he had been asked to define his own character he would have said that he was a philosopher. And so he was. He had thought his philosophy out years before. Such as it was he accepted it, and acted upon it consistently enough. In one sense he was fortunate. When a man is able to say to himself with conviction that it is a funny game—that life is a funny game—he is on a plane that, if not the highest, is at any rate out of the way of some dangers. He had at least a likely prospect of escaping both the morgue and the lunatic asylum. It is true that the remark just quoted is painfully hackneyed and meaningless in the mouths of most people. But on the lips of

Le Mercier it was a creed—if not a religious creed, the nearest approach to one that he possessed.

Like most demagogues he had a passion for argument. With a fine catholicity of taste he could make himself equally at home before an audience of one or an audience of a thousand. When in a certain mood there was no one with whom he would rather argue than his landlady. The argument was all on one side. The woman had a tender regard for Le Mercier. In a way he fascinated her. For one thing he paid his board without having to be threatened with dire penalties of the law—and that was what most of the guests in the rather dingy, rather second-rate boarding-house did not do. His compliments did the rest. It mattered little that these compliments were more ironical than serious. The lady often had a suspicion that he was laughing at her. But perhaps on that account—such is the nature of women—she was fascinated all the more.

Mrs. Kelly—that was her name ; it had been Brady before her marriage, but who Mr. Kelly had been before he departed for another world nobody knew or inquired—Mrs. Kelly was proud of Le Mercier for several reasons. She was proud of his conversational powers, proud of his acquaintance with leading political lights, proud of the fact that a Minister of the Crown had been in the habit of sitting in his room on the only chair, while Le Mercier himself sat and smoked on the bed. These things gave

her boarding-house a prestige and made other boarding-house keepers jealous. But why did he wear such a disreputable coat? And why did he change his collar only once a fortnight? And why, after being seen coming out of the office of a great man—in Mrs. Kelly's eyes these politicians were all great men—did he go off with such dreadful-looking people and spend so many hours in threepenny bars in a back street? She was puzzled and rather distressed over these things. She sometimes spoke to him about them. Usually he treated her well-meant inquiries with indifferent silence. Once or twice he had launched out in discursive fashion.

"Clothes, my good woman," he had said to her on one occasion, "why do you talk to me about clothes? 'Pon my honour, I thought you were different from other women; I thought you had a soul above clothes. I thought you could recognise and appreciate the man, Mrs. Kelly—the man without these inorganic filaments—the man such as Nature made him, whether he had any clothes or not."

She was silenced. She recognised that she was no match for him in argument. Still, on the subject of clothes, she was convinced that she was right and he was wrong.

She had also talked to him about marriage. Why did he not get married? He wanted someone to look after him; she was sure a man of his temperament—a man careless and neglectful of himself—would be better married.

This was playing into Le Mercier's hands. The topic was one in which he fairly revelled. When she had first broached it to him he smiled a grim, peculiar smile. Later he had often broached it himself. He threw it out as a draw to the honest woman, playing her with it in the fashion of an angler playing with a fish.

"Do you really think," he had said to her on coming down to breakfast one morning, with eyes inflamed, and a rather the worse-for-wear feeling, "that any woman would have me? Do you really think so? Just look at me—forty if I'm a day. A distinguished political friend of mine, a gentleman that we used to know by the name of Horace, was just my age, when he protested that it was time the women gave up disturbing his peace of mind. "Thanks," as she handed him a cup of strong tea, "if *you* were to get married now it would be well enough. There might be some excuse for that. And though I am bound to say that I should have to battle with the demon of jealousy, I should do my best not to show my feelings."

When first he talked to her like this, she had entertained the idea that he wanted to marry her himself. But she was quickly undeceived.

"There are some extraordinary things," he said to her once—it was one of his prosperous evenings, and he had brought home a bottle of claret instead of the usual Colonial beer—"some frightful things committed in the name of morality, and marriage is

one of the worst of them. You don't agree with me? Your sex never does. Get a glass, and let's talk it over."

She was not particularly fond of wine, but she was always more than willing to hear him talk.

"One of the greatest crimes and the greatest absurdities known to civilisation," he continued, "is to tie people up to each other for life. It makes you wonder if the world has not been mad for the last five thousand years. Just think of it. Suppose they tied us up for life—pleasant enough for me, no doubt—but for you, horrible beyond description, dreadful beyond words. No wonder you shudder. Have some more wine? Yes," pouring out another glass, and rolling his eyes at her, "a mockery, a phantasm, a delusion, a chimera, an altar of sacrifice, an altar that always smokes, and a sacrifice that goes on for ever. Aha! don't I know it? Haven't I been through it? I talk to you like this because you are a sensible woman. You can understand. I like you, Mrs. Kelly, I admire you. You have been a good friend to me; yes, you have, I'm only warning you; I want to have you warned in time. The Lord only knows when some dashed scoundrel may come along and want to marry you off-hand. Getting late? So it is. Good night then. Good night, and don't make a fool of yourself over anyone."

For some weeks after this outburst he had not addressed to her more than a passing word. Once or twice she had seen his name in the paper in

connection with some Labour movement. She had a vague idea that he was working for his country in some whole-hearted and insufficiently remunerated way, and that it was because his country needed him, and couldn't do without him, that he spent so little of his time at home, and so much of it out of doors. The casual remarks he made were intended to confirm this view. While she was sometimes pained over his indifference and carelessness to herself, she derived a real pleasure and a reflected glory from his manifest greatness in the eyes of the world.

On the morning when he adjusted his tie with such unusual care, Le Mercier descended the narrow stairs with a buoyant tread and a look on his face which took ten years off his age. He had great schemes in hand. He knew that there were political changes in the air. And he knew more about what was likely to happen than anyone except the principals themselves. It would be a marvel if he could not make something out of the knowledge. At any rate they would see, the people who pretended to despise Le Mercier, would soon see—what they would see.

His first business was with Johansen. And Johansen, he knew, was a hard nut to crack. In the first place it was not easy to get near him. Luckily he had managed to arrange an interview. It had been fixed for half an hour before mid-day on that very morning, and was to take place in one of the

rooms at Parliament House. By the time he had finished breakfast it was a few minutes after eleven.

He had a general rather than an exact plan of operations in his head when he mounted the steps of the building. He would find out in the first place what Johansen knew. Then he would find out what he intended to do. Of course he would not get this information for nothing. He would have to show his own hand first. He would have to tell what he knew. He would have to give away Rayment, to give away Bryant, to give away the Labour Party—or at least to pretend to give them away. That was the point. It was to be a battle of wits. If he did not think he would get all he wanted, he had great hopes of getting something that he could use as a trump-card at the meeting at the Trades' Hall that night.

He met his man walking about the corridors.

"Come in here," said Johansen, showing the way into one of the Opposition Rooms. It was empty. "Now," dropping into a seat and crossing one leg over the other, "what is it you want?"

Le Mercier sat on the table. He folded his arms and looked the other man squarely in the face. It was impossible to imagine a greater contrast than that presented by the two men. Le Mercier, with the wreck of his insolent good looks, with the still quick intelligence which only his hopeless laziness could have dragged down, with the battered appearance that the very cursory effort at adornment an hour previously had not removed, with the unmistakable imprint of

reckless dissipation and social outlawry on his face—that was the man who sat on the table. He sat there because he would have thought it a spiritless concession to social custom to sit anywhere else.

Johansen had nearly all the qualities that Le Mercier lacked. He was a man of studied reserve. He cultivated appearances. He strove to impress the public, and generally succeeded. He never let himself be taken off his guard. He was a man of clear cut, expressive features, controlled by a strong will. Clean shaven, with something of the actor's physiognomy, he would have looked well on any stage. The limelight would have suited him. Metaphorically he stood always in the limelight. The mean and petty things of politics he hated, or professed to hate. He had that reputation. He was attracted by the big things. He would always for preference talk about the big things. People who knew him slightly, or knew him only by repute, had the idea that he was intensely proud. His enemies said he was a coxcomb, and most people agreed that he was theatrical. His few intimate acquaintances—they were very few—swore that there was not a more tender-hearted man in the world.

Of the two men it would be hard to say which disliked the other more. Dislike each other they certainly did. In Le Mercier's case there was a mixture of envy and spite with the other feeling—the envy that an unsuccessful man feels for a successful one. In his view Johansen was a con-

summate hypocrite. As for any purity of motive, or abnegation of self, or loftiness of purpose, the Labour agitator simply did not believe in their existence. The supreme contempt he felt for the public professor of them was only less than the contempt he felt for the people who were gulled by them.

As for Johansen, he regarded it as one of the penalties of his public career that he should have to hold any communication with such a man as Le Mercier. The man's associations, his manner of life, his character, his appearance, were all equally repulsive. But he knew that Le Mercier was politically not to be despised. He knew that he pulled a dozen Labour strings. He knew that, as an underground burrower, he had probably no equal on the Australian continent. And knowing that, he adjudged it wise to hear what he had to say.

"What do you want?"

The question was emphasised by the look accompanying it—a look which said that one of the parties to the interview had not much time to spare.

"I was anxious to see you," said Le Mercier, restraining his natural insolence with difficulty, and conscious of a feeling of intense irritation—a feeling that years back would have been one of shame at the outward difference between himself and the man he was speaking to. "I was anxious to see you in view of the meeting of our Council to-night. It will be one of the most important meetings held for a long time; I might say for years."

The face of the other man betrayed nothing.

"I needn't tell you," went on Le Mercier, "that something is going to happen next week. Something has happened already. Perhaps you know what it is. Perhaps you don't. I know. It might be interesting to you if you contemplate moving your No-Confidence Motion on Tuesday to hear some reliable information about the intentions of the other side. And I might perhaps be able to tell you."

"I have no doubt," said Johansen, dryly, "that Mr. Le Mercier has sources of information open to few."

If the sarcasm hit home, there was no outward sign of the fact.

"It is pretty well known to everybody," the Labour agitator remarked sententiously, "that the Government is in a queer way. It can't last over the coming Session unless—but perhaps I needn't go into that."

"I should be sorry to appear rude ; but will you come to the point? What is it you wanted to see me about?"

"What do I want to see you about?"

"Yes. What do you expect me to tell you? What is your game?"

"If you put it to me that way, I will ask you the same question : what's yours?"

"Just what I thought. You wish to find out what I intend to do."

Le Mercier looked hard at his man, then dropped his eyes, and stood up from the table. He fidgeted about uneasily. Johansen's methods were direct enough to be disconcerting.

"It is not a matter of idle curiosity," he protested. "If you can give the Labour Party a line to go by, it may be better for both sides. I am certain it would be better for you. If you treat us fairly, we'll treat you the same. I don't expect you to tell me for nothing. We might make a fair exchange. I am in the confidence of two of the Ministry, and it may surprise you to know that——"

Johansen held up his hand.

"You needn't trouble ; I don't want to hear."

"You don't want to hear?"

"No, for the reason—I trust you will not be offended—that I wouldn't believe it if I did hear."

"Well, I'm——"

"What's the use of getting angry? You are a clever man up to a certain point, and you don't expect me to believe that you would tell the truth unless it suited you. And how do I know whether it would suit you or not?"

"You mean then," said Le Mercier, in the bullying tone of the professional demagogue, "that you snap your fingers at us? Very well. You can do that to me, but you can't insult the representative of Labour in this country, Mr. Johansen, without being sorry for it some time."

"You know perfectly well I haven't insulted you."

The other man stood fingering his hat, uncertain whether to make another attempt to get what he wanted or to leave the room. He was just about to leave when the politician, who had been knitting his brows as if rapidly turning over some plan of action, called him back.

"I'm going to surprise you. If you are reporting to the meeting to-night, you can tell them that I am going to move on Tuesday. I don't profess to know yet what the result will be. You can tell them that I am going to move, and that I stand or fall by the programme I gave to the country six months ago. If the Labour corner will support me, well and good ; if they won't, I can't help it. They know my views at any rate. If it's any satisfaction to you to have got that much, you can have it. Good morning."

"Curse you," muttered Le Mercier, as he emerged into the street, "but I believe you meant what you said."

Out in the open air he felt a trifle lost and uncertain what to do next. The last turn of events had taken him by surprise. He had fully made up his mind that his mission was to be a failure. At the last moment it had proved at least a modified success. Well, so much the better. It was one step gained. It was necessary to pass the time between mid-day and the meeting of the Labour Council that night. He did what he seldom did in the middle of the day ; he went home.

Mrs. Kelly heard her lodger's step while she was engaged in household work, and secretly wondered. Coming up to the top part of the house not many minutes later, she put her head round his door. He was fast asleep on the bed. It was a hot afternoon. The window was open, and a breath of air disturbed a lock of still dark hair on his forehead. The rougher lines of his face were in shadow. She looked at him for fully half a minute, and then softly closed the door.

* * * * *

It was ten o'clock, and the lights were blazing in Mandano's hotel. Gilded youths of various ages were standing around the bar. Most of them were talking; many of them were making praiseworthy efforts to be more brilliant than Nature intended them to be. If the majority only succeeded in being inane, there were no censorious critics to take notice. At the small round tables in the saloon men sat apart and talked over the events and impressions of the day. The Hebes behind the counter were gracious, and smiling, and intelligent, as at this house they invariably are—more gracious and more intelligent than any other quartette of girls to be met with in the hundreds of similar places in Sydney—places similar in kind, but much less in degree; places, in short, which the name of Mandano does not adorn.

Into this cheerful company on the evening with which we are now concerned, two men came unobtrusively. One of them was Le Mercier, refreshed after his slumbers of the afternoon, and to all appearances pleased with the result of the meeting that night. The other was Sharpe, the same alert and intelligent individual who has been met with before in the *Recorder* offices. The business between them was exclusive and confidential.

The presence of Sharpe was easily explained. It was well known in newspaper circles that the Trades' Hall meeting was to be important. The growing strength of the Labour Party was fully recognised. The meeting was held *in camera*. Extraordinary secrecy was observed in regard to it. Judging by the silent and impressive manner in which delegates passed in and out of the meeting hall, something great and startling was in preparation.

Sharpe, who had spent most of the evening in the vicinity of the hall, had seen Le Mercier come down the steps. He went over and spoke to him. The two men were well known to each other. It was natural, therefore, that Sharpe could accost Le Mercier. It was equally natural, knowing his man, that he should propose an adjournment to an hotel. It would have been little short of marvellous if the invitation had been refused.

The newspaper man was too shrewd to rush matters. He talked of indifferent things. Le Mercier for his part was just as indifferent. But he

knew perfectly well what was wanted. He had not been in the least surprised to find Sharpe outside the building. As a matter of fact he had counted on finding him there. The game was going fairly well for him. But he was too experienced a player to reveal his hand before the time was ripe.

The two men sat at one of the round tables. As a rule, Le Mercier patronised less reputable places. But he was quite at home here. The liquor was of the best, and it was being paid for by someone else. Nothing could have been more conducive to a pleasant evening. He nodded to one of the girls behind the bar and raised his glass to her. She smiled back at him.

"Can't help liking these girls," he said to Sharpe. "For one thing there is nothing too ostentatiously virtuous about them."

"I don't know," remarked Sharpe, "I daresay you're right ; I wouldn't like to venture an opinion."

"There may be virtue enough," explained Le Mercier, "but what I mean is that it isn't always being paraded before your eyes. Of all the dashed, disagreeable, depressing things in this world, commend me to a virtuous woman. I mean the woman who advertises her virtue—who hits you in the eye with it—who carries it about with her and labels it for fear you mightn't know it was there."

"H'm!" said the newspaper man. It was a remark that committed him to nothing.

"I have no objection to virtue. And I am not

particularly fond of the other thing. Heaven knows one is about as disagreeable as the other. Perhaps a little more so. It's the dashed dogmatic, pragmatic way of advertising virtue that I object to."

He paused and looked round him with the air of a man who had uttered the last word on a great social question.

The journalist's parchment face was as expressionless as ever, but his bright beady eyes moved about restlessly. He looked at his watch. Time was getting on. He leaned across to Le Mercier and said something in an undertone.

The rest of the conversation was carried on in the same subdued key. Sharpe did most of the questioning. Le Mercier listened, kept his lips closed, and occasionally shook his head. Then he turned round to Sharpe with the air of a man about to make a counter proposition. Whatever it was, it caused the listener some hesitation. He toyed with his glass, looked round the room, and made an occasional remark about someone who had newly come in.

Le Mercier drained his glass, and set it down with emphasis. "You can't expect me to do it for nothing," he said.

Sharpe was still silent, and still looking in front of him

"I'm off," said Le Mercier, fixing his hat on more firmly.

"Agreed then. But you are doing the fair thing,

mind—you are not going to put us on the wrong track? If you are”—the tone had a distinctly warning sound as well as a hint of sinister meaning.

“We’ll have it down on paper. Then, if there is anything crooked, someone can be made to pay the piper.”

Sharpe produced from his pocket a fountain pen and a sheet of paper. Ten minutes later he was in possession of practically all that had happened at the Labour meeting, while Le Mercier, for his part, held a written promise signed on behalf of the newspaper office for a definite sum. Even then there was no hurry and no sign of excitement. Sharpe rose leisurely, and lighted a cigarette. His eye had been caught by someone who had just come in—someone in the centre of a group of three, all young, all in evening dress, and all talking excitedly and laughing loudly.

“Know who that is?” he inquired.

Le Mercier followed the look and nodded. He knew who it was well enough.

“Young Ward, who rode Gasconader in the Steeple. Seems to be going the pace faster than ever now. Rather a pity too. A fair deal, mind!”

The newspaper man was gone.

Le Mercier remained a little longer at the table absently handling his empty glass. He could catch what the new-comers were saying. The three were standing just in front of him. The youngest of

them seemed to be excited, and was talking louder than was necessary.

"Thought she was going to faint," said one of the two, "when you nearly came down at the treble."

"Lucky dog, you are anyway," said the third.

"Lucky, be hanged," said Bertie fiercely. "She doesn't care two straws about me. I wish to heaven she did. Tried to make an appointment with her, but she won't take any notice. I tell you, she's as good as gold."

The two laughed boisterously, and then, seeing that the boy's indignation was real, subsided.

The conversation had passed through Le Mercier's head without conveying any impression to him. But it did occur to him, as he made his way into the street, that it had been an eventful, and, on the whole, a successful day.

CHAPTER XII.

A FIGHT WITH SHADOWS.

T seemed to Arthur Ward, restlessly tossing from side to side and strangely weighted down in sense and spirit, that the night was longer and more unyielding than mortal man had ever lived through. He was neither awake nor asleep. If it could be called sleep it was a sleep dominated by the consciousness of his own personalty and filled with semi-waking dreams. Prometheus-like, he was chained down on his back and compelled to gaze upwards at a storm-driven, scowling, inhospitable sky. The sky was the domain of his own consciousness; the clouds were the thoughts that drove across it; the storm and the thunder were the more troubled and disturbing of the images that broke in upon his distracted sleep.

Superstition can hardly be said to survive in these days. It has been discredited, and driven into out-of-the-way corners. Yet there are times even now when the world of sense and the world of spirit

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become intermingled. There are times when the hold upon things tangible is lost. There are times when our professed materialism is shivered to atoms, and we are all spiritualists, whether we admit it or not. We see the unseen. We live among shadows. For an hour, for half an hour, for a night we walk among shadows, and believe only in shadows. And these very shadows, as they drive across the heaven or hell of our suspended consciousness, are more real than the couch upon which we lie, or the four walls of the room that shuts us in. As for Arthur Ward, a trifle unsettled after the mental stir and stress of the past few days, a trifle overwearied in brain and body, he seemed to himself to have been fighting with shadows for at least a hundred years. Shrouded and entangled as though in some encumbering night-curtain, he yet seemed to have made his tempestuous way myriads of miles into regions where living men had never before trod.

He had lain down to sleep thinking he would see Rayment in the morning. On that subject his intention was clear. He was prepared for any negotiations that might be suggested to him. He had fed himself on sophistries, knowing they were sophistries, yet deliberately choosing them in preference to anything else. Why should he be quixotic? Why should he set up a standard of political ethics at which every practical man would raise a shout of derisive laughter? Why should he

get up on moral stilts and make an object of himself? And why after all was he justified in assuming that his was the only right theory, his the only proper scruple, his the only correct standard of right and wrong? These other people, these newspaper proprietors, these party leaders, these politicians of all shades of opinion, saw no harm in playing every card for what it was worth. It was quite true, as his brother had said, that politics resembled a game of poker. It was necessary to bluff, and again to bluff, and to keep on bluffing. And the bluffing had to be on an extensive scale. To be a really great success you had to bluff, not only the public, but the opposite political party, your own colleagues and yourself as well.

What was the alternative? There was no need to ask what that was. Obscurity, poverty, chronic dissatisfaction with his surroundings, the reproach of nothingness, the reproach of want of power, the reproach of want of success. And the reward on the other side? An audience, an influence, an opportunity, a series of opportunities, a widening horizon, a chance of fame, of fortune, of love, of her with laughing lips—of her!

He was inclined to end on that last note—to sleep and to dream on the visions it conjured up. But other images would rush in. As he laid his head down on the pillow he was thinking of Rayment's daughter; but he could not shake off the thought of Rayment. Waking or sleeping, he

hardly knew which, he ever saw the two together. They were strangely, inextricably blended. Across a dim distance he saw the brown hair, the sweet eyes, and the warm lips of the woman smiling at him. And as he looked and looked, and struggled on to overcome the distance, he saw that the lips were smiling with a bitter disdainful smile. The chill of that smile went to his heart and he could not utter a word or move a step. All the time, in some vague, forbidding way, Rayment himself was standing near, threatening him. He saw the face as he had seen it once or twice in real life—a face wearing a scowl, a face from which the mask of urbanity and good temper had fallen, a face looming large and hideous in the shadows, never once altering its expression of deadly, implacable resentment towards himself.

Still battling with these dream-fantasies, he became conscious, or semi-conscious, of a change. Between him and the woman, between him and the man came another image. And it brought a keener pang, struck a colder chill than anything that had gone before. Bertie! Had he uttered the name or had someone cried it in his ears? Bertie it was; Bertie on horseback; a shadowy, ghostly Bertie on a more shadowy, more ghostly horse; surrounded by ghosts of horses and ghosts of riders; the whole cavalcade riding a terrific race at a terrific speed, but riding it amid a weird silence, a silence of the dead. Fences were taken,

timber was struck, the rush came nearer, the field swept past like a dark and awful tempest; but always there was that shadow of night, and always there was that silence as of the dead.

He knew that it was Bertie riding there in advance of the others, because Bertie's face was imprinted on his brain. He saw it plainly in his sleep, though he had been unable to see it a day before, when the living flesh-and-blood troop had thundered by. It was an infinitely more dangerous and a more awful race this time than the real one which his waking eyes had witnessed. It was a Mazeppa race; a race along a rotten plank with fathomless precipices on either side; a race which his brother was riding with devils as his pursuers; a race which could have no other ending than the abyss.

He awoke suddenly. He shook the nightmare off and sat up in bed. He reached out his hand and pulled aside the blind. The light struggled in feebly. The morning was still in the throes of birth. It was the strangest, most mysterious hour of the twenty-four, but it was better than the dark. The light was growing, though very slowly. He watched it grow. He knew that his face—if anyone could see it—must be haggard and white. His nerves were not steady. But he knew that he was awake—and even that knowledge was precious after the hours that had just passed.

He got up, lighted the lamp, and poured out a

little brandy into a glass. He drank it at a gulp. It revived him wonderfully. He thought of Bertie steadily, clearly. He went back to bed, folded his hands behind his head, and lay awake with wide open eyes.

Never at any time had he been a victim of illusions. They had always been something outside his nature and his beliefs. He was not superstitious now. But lying there, wide awake, watching the dawn grow and the lamplight fade, he was clearly and definitely alive to *a sense of coming evil*. It might be merely part of some physical reaction. Very probably it was. He told himself that it would pass away. And yet—and yet, deep down in his wakeful consciousness, weighing upon his reason and strangling its effort to shake off the gloom, was not merely the foreshadowing, but the belief, amounting almost to conviction, that some disaster which he could not even guess at was at hand.

He knew that his brother had been carrying on recklessly since his steeplechase ride. He had been talking recklessly, spending money recklessly, drinking recklessly. His latest experience had done him no good. The sudden springing up of nerve and courage which had led to the magnificent effort on the course had given way to the old worse than folly, the old weakness of will.

"I wish to Heaven," the elder brother muttered, "I could get him away somewhere. He wants a fresh

start. He wants to get away from the present crowd altogether. If anything happens to him—and what can happen but disgrace?”

Disgrace! What had the world ever done for him or for those belonging to him that he or they should concern themselves with its opinion of what was and what was not disgrace? What was disgrace? What did it mean, anyway? What was this rag they called honour? Were not the honoured people often the most dishonoured? . . . But it was madness to go over that ground again.

And then he turned with gradually reviving warmth and hope to the memory that had been with him when he was trying to fall asleep—that she had said what she had said, had rested in his arms as she had done, that he would see her again—but would he see her again? Would he—after all? Would he be rash enough to burn any incense at that inaccessible shrine? He supposed so. He did not know. It might be wise and more prudent not to; but then vision and prudence were ghostly comforters, and he had too many ghostly comforters already. The need now was for something real and human; and she was very real and very human. Everything around him was shifting, changing; for the sake of his own health, happiness, and future he would not—it was not fair to ask him—he would not let go of this. With the growing dawn there came in a strain of once familiar, but since forgotten, music :

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“ Ah! my Felise, if love or sin,
If shame or fear, could hold it fast—
Should we not hold it?”

He fell into a calmer sleep.

A couple of hours later, when broad daylight was streaming through the window, he rose and dressed. He still bore some traces of a bad night; his face was haggard, and there were dark lines under his eyes, but his head was clear and his purpose more settled than ever. He knew that Rayment would be in his office by eleven o'clock. That would be in about three hours' time. He would see Rayment then. The reaction from the previous depression had begun. After all, there were more possibilities in life now than there had been twelve or even three months ago. He whistled as he went down the stairs.

The *Recorder* sheet was lying on the breakfast-room table. He opened it with merely the occasional interest that most men feel in what is going on throughout the world. The first thing that caught his eye was the heading, “A Political Sensation.” It was rather a startling headline; what was it all about? He grasped the paper harder, and read with a trifle more interest. The interest quickly rose to astonishment; the astonishment rose to dismay, and struck with the force of a physical blow.

The information in the article, from whatever source supplied, was full and, up to a certain

point, exhaustive. As Le Mercier would have said himself, the whole show had been given away. That conversation in Mandano's—of which, of course, the man now staring at the sheet in front of him knew nothing—had related to much else besides the proceedings of the Labour meeting. Someone had been permitted an entry behind, not one scene, but many. Someone had been let into the Minister's confidence. And someone had made capital out of the fact. The betrayal had been complete.

The editorial genius of the *Recorder* office was fully alive to all the stimulating possibilities of the situation. He knew that he had got hold of a choice morsel. He was the last man in the world to let it drop easily. He treated it in the fashion of an expert *chef* who has something quite new with which to adorn the *menu* card. He served it up in different shapes and under different guises. He brought it in both hot and cold. First of all he presented it *en masse*, seasoned only by a number of attractive headlines, and garnished with large capital letters. Then he made a *rechauffé* of it, and dished it up to the accompaniment of much mustard and ginger in his leading columns. Finally, he dealt it out in topical paragraphs and such like side delicacies, well calculated to suit the palates of those who had not much appetite for heavier fare.

The leading article was headed, "A Ministerial

Somersault," and the gist of it was contained in the following passages :—

"The acrobatic feats of certain of our politicians have been the subject of comment on more than one occasion. Unfortunately, the standard of public morality in this country is not as high as it might be, or as it ought to be. The electors have been gulled before to-day. Shameless duplicity has been practised on them before to-day. Yet it is doubtful whether any of our readers will be able to recall a project quite so daring and quite so unscrupulous as that to which we give publicity this morning. Never since the first granting of responsible government to this colony, never since the first British Dependency was released from leading strings, has any Minister of the Crown been convicted of so deliberate, so shameless, so wanton an attempt to kick down the ladder by which he rose to power, and to hoist himself higher on the shoulders of the credulous people who put faith in him. The mine appears to have been carefully laid. It was to have been sprung on the community only next week. All the details had been carefully prepared. Mr. Johansen was to move his No-Confidence motion as soon as the House met. The Minister of Education and Labour was to be absent during the debate—on what flimsy pretext we do not pretend to know. The next turn of the wheel was to see the Bryant Government out of office, and the astute Mr. Rayment colleaguings with the successful mover of the No-Confidence motion in

regard to the *personnel* of the new Cabinet. Needless to say, the price of the ex-Minister's desertion of his colleagues was to be a stiff one. It was to be nothing less than a half share of the Premiership! It was pre-arranged that the head of the new Government was to be a Janus-like affair, one side of it presenting the face of Johansen, and the other side of it presenting the face of Rayment. What do our readers think of underground manœuvring of this character? Could the shameful and degrading arts of the political trickster and huckster—nay, more, of the political hypocrite and traitor—be carried to a further pass?

“But even this was not all. We are in a position to assert that the fertile Rayment brain would not have stopped even here. There were to have been still further developments; and though the imputation of motive is no part of our business, we say unhesitatingly that yet another turn of the wheel would have left Rayment in sole possession, and that Johansen would have had cause to regret bitterly the negotiations into which he had allowed himself to be duped. We do not say for a moment that Mr. Johansen has acted in bad faith. His part was to be the honest, though inglorious one, of an unconscious stepping-stone for Mr. Rayment.”

After a few more general comments on the situation, the article concluded as follows:—

“Can there be any future for a politician of this class—a politician who will grossly and flagrantly

violate every principle of loyalty and common honesty for his own sordid love of gain? Will the public continue to trust him any longer? Will his deluded constituents still have faith in a man who has waxed fat on promises never kept—who has pandered to them for his own purposes, has fooled them before and has intended to fool them again? The facts call for the plainest of plain speaking. The public may rest assured that there is chapter and verse for every one of the statements just made. And if Mr. Rayment dislikes the tone of these remarks, or is prepared to attempt a refutation of anything that has been said, the remedy is at any moment open to him in the Courts of Law."

Ward dropped the paper and stared blankly in front of him. He scarcely realised at first what this meant. It was too sudden and unexpected. It was quite clear, however, that from the point of view of the Minister it was serious; so serious that the ultimate consequences could not yet be fully gauged. The mine had been sprung with a vengeance. And it seemed impossible that from the wreck made by such a disclosure any reliable reputation or any coherent and successful policy could be built up.

Yet the thought of the source from which came all this virtuous indignation did occur to him, causing a bitter smile in the midst of very real distress and disgust. It was the *Recorder* that had raised this furious blast in the interests of public morality and political honour. It was the *Recorder* whose fine sense of

decorum was shocked. It was the *Recorder* that was uttering this siren shriek in the name of everything that was pure and holy—the very *Recorder* which was known to stick at nothing and which had shamelessly attempted to bribe him less than three months ago.

The probable effect of the article on his own prospects did not immediately occur to him. That he should be pointed out by Rayment and Rayment's circle as having given the secret away was an afterthought. But when the idea did present itself it came with almost startling force. Of course, he would be suspected. He could scarcely hope to be otherwise. He was in Rayment's confidence. So far as he knew there was no one else in the same predicament.

There was a sharp ring at the door. As the landlady handed him a telegram, there was a worse sinking at his heart than he had experienced yet. By a sudden intuition he seemed to know what was coming.

The telegram was unsigned, and contained only one sentence:—

“Will Mr. Ward consider engagement for Friday cancelled.”

So that was it? Well, it mattered very little. If she believed—if she could believe—that he had been guilty of such treachery, there was condescension in sending him any message—even such a blunt and brutal message as that. And yet, how could

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she? If she had any eyes, or sense, or brain at all, how could she believe this thing of one to whom she had spoken as she had done—into whose eyes she was looking only a few hours ago? Did she really think, whatever he might be or might not be, that he was capable of crawling round to a newspaper office for the purpose of giving away the political honour of her father's house?

The matter could not be allowed to rest there. He must see her, if only for a moment. He was done for so far as Rayment was concerned. His prospects were hopelessly gone in that quarter. That was nothing. But he could not walk about the streets under the weight of this woman's unmerited suspicions. Self-respect demanded that he should see her. If she could not be convinced, she should have back scorn for scorn.

The breakfast was pushed away untasted. He drank a cup of coffee scalding hot, and asked for another. He was aware of a feeling that resembled thirst, but was not that.

It was no use writing. If she believed him guilty now she would not believe any paper protestations even if she read them. It was no use asking her to see him. It was ten chances to one she would not accede to the wish. There was only one other course open to him.

He made up his mind to do a rash and foolish thing, knowing quite well that it was rash and foolish, but believing that anything would be better

than the present intolerable state of affairs. He would go across to her house and compel her to meet him. He would go that very night. She might be out. No matter if she was; he would wait till she came back. He would see her and say the one word he had to say—then leave her and try to forget that such a woman had ever lived.

With this settled conviction in his mind he felt his hot sense of indignation and resentment cooling down. He picked up the paper more calmly and read the incriminating article over again.

CHAPTER XIII.

A TRAGEDY.

“HAT will do as well as any.”

A man who had just emerged from the darkness pointed to one of the boats lying at the foot of the steps, and a phlegmatic boatman got the sculls and rudder ready.

It was an unusual proceeding, this of rowing across the harbour at such an hour. The cheap and obvious and simple method was to have recourse to the ferry. If any other plan were hit upon, the presumption would be that the person choosing it was either actuated by a very peculiar set of circumstances, or that he had an irrepressible mania for outdoor exercise. In the present instance, one of these theories would have been nearly correct. The circumstances were peculiar. They went far to explain what looked like an utterly illogical proceeding. But before and since Leander swam the Hellespont, before and since Hinemoa plunged into

Rotorua, many foolish and illogical things have been done in order to bring about a desired meeting.

The motive that influenced the man who now took his seat at the oars was at least capable of explanation. The night air was grateful, and the night air was cooler on the harbour than it was anywhere else. The journey by ferry would be an affair of but a few minutes. The rowing-boat would take longer, and for that reason was more desirable. The occupant felt that he needed exercise. He wanted something to steady his nerves.

"If I'm late," he called out to the boatman, "you needn't hang about the steps for me. I can moor the boat up myself."

It was about an hour's row, and the water was dark and inky-looking. At intervals a paddle-steamer rushed past, churning up the water as it went. For a moment its glittering broadside illumined the whole scene, the harbour, the shipping, and the shadowy shores, and then everything was blacker by contrast. The oarsman steered by the gleam of the quay behind him. Looking over his shoulder he could see the sprinkle of lights on the northern side of the harbour—lights that were numerous and brilliant in the vicinity of the ferry steps, but thinned and scattered as they climbed the hill, and dwindled to an occasional isolated glimmer when they attempted to break the darkness lying beyond.

He rowed hard, and without resting. The hull of

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a big sailing ship lying at anchor was passed within a few feet. It was more by good fortune than by good judgment that a collision was averted.

"Hey, there!" shouted someone at watch on deck. "Look out where you're going, can't you?"

The shadow of the black hull as he glided past it, no less than the warning voice of the man on deck, recalled him to his surroundings. He checked his feverish activity at the oars, and proceeded more warily, keeping his head constantly turned over his shoulder.

There was a small, dimly lighted landing-place only a few hundred yards from the gate which led into the grounds of Rayment's house. After a careful scrutiny he managed to discover it, and pulled alongside. He jumped out and stretched himself after the hour's pull. Bending over the tow-line in the act of making the boat fast to one of the wooden pillars, the conviction forcibly presented itself that no fool's errand had ever been quite so foolish or had looked quite so unpromising as this. Yet even now there was no intention of turning back.

As he looked upwards, and, through an interval between the garden trees, could make out the glimmer of a light—of more than one light—from the Minister's house, the thought did occur that if, by one of the happy chances dear to the fiction writer, she would only step down and meet him on that spot, a great deal of anxiety and a great deal of

possible unpleasantness to himself might be avoided. But it is an unfortunate fact that the modern woman is becoming intractable, and cannot be relied upon to appear when and where she is wanted. If a man does foolish things in real life, he must, unless he is very exceptionally fortunate, follow out the consequences to the bitter end. Miss Rayment, at any rate, was invisible as the Egyptian Isis, and there was nothing for it but to seek her where she was most likely to be found.

He left the boat at its moorings, skirted the path that ran round by the water's edge, and entered the gate. He walked past the front of the house, avoiding the gravel walk, and stepping on the grass. His eyes were fixed on two upstairs windows in the left wing; both were lighted, though the front and centre of the house were in shadow. The larger window was that of Maud Rayment's room; the adjoining apartment might be that of her friend, Edith Grey.

He concluded, and concluded rightly, that she was at home. He had rather counted on finding that she had gone out. Had that been the case, a long wait might have been necessary, though this would not have mattered very much. He would have waited and spoken to her as she came up the path. The probability that others would have been with her scarcely crossed his mind. In any case he would have gone forward openly. That would have been better than standing

here like some wandering prowler, looking up at the window, an object, could anyone see him, of unmitigated scorn and derision. At last he was beginning to see himself, and to see her, in the true colours. The exercise and the night air had done their work—had brought a clearer light and a clearer understanding to bear upon the troubled events of the last few hours. Thank Heaven, the state of feeling that had prompted this mad escapade was beginning to pass away. If he had made himself ridiculous, it was no use making himself more ridiculous by remaining. He turned slowly and meditatively back.

A door of the house opened unexpectedly, and a girl's figure appeared. The logical faculty that had been in the ascendant a moment before was temporarily paralyzed. He stepped forward with eager expectancy, and then as suddenly recoiled.

It was the other woman. The cry of alarm and astonishment was arrested on her lips. She stood at the entrance trembling, with the door half open, half closed behind her. It was impossible to say whether she had recognised the intruder or not.

"Miss Grey," he said, recovering himself and coming forward, "don't you know me? It's I, Arthur Ward."

"Oh!" It was a gasping exclamation, half of astonishment and half of relief. She looked at him with palpable surprise and a trace of shyness.

"I want to speak to you for just a moment. I

have rowed across from the Man-o'-war steps. I know it's very late, but I can't help it. Don't be frightened. I'm not a thief or a burglar. I've no evil designs on anyone. Step out here and speak to me."

The tone was urgent and almost peremptory. Still wondering, but no longer frightened, she stepped off the verandah on to the lawn, and stood beside him.

"I came to see Miss Rayment"—the voice was a trifle husky, and very earnest. "She's inside, I know. That's her window—where the light is. Will you do me a great favour? Will you tell her that I want to see her—that I want to see her now?"

He could see that she hesitated. He thought she was going to refuse, and went on hurriedly :

"I know it's not the usual thing. But it's a matter of very great importance. I can't tell you how much it means. It isn't merely a question of sentiment ; if it were, I wouldn't be here ; I wouldn't ask you to do this. It's a question of my own reputation, and my own honour. It's everything to me—it's a question of life and death."

"Of course"—the answer came slowly and doubtfully—"I will tell Miss Rayment if you wish. But would it not be better to wait till to-morrow? Must you speak to her now?"

"Thanks, thanks," he exclaimed fervently, forgetting her last question in the relief her assurance

gave him. "You are good. I haven't forgotten how good you were to me up at the Mountains. I am an unfortunate beggar—more unfortunate than you think, or than I can tell you—but I hope some day I may repay you for what you have done for me."

She could see that he looked ill. His face was almost unnaturally thin, and his eyes were strained. She was a gentle girl, and his appearance, combined with the intense earnestness of his manner, caused a break in her voice as she spoke to him again, laying a hand rather timidly on his arm.

"Don't let it trouble you. I wish I could help you; I wish you didn't care so much about—about——"

"About what?"

"About her. I don't think she's worth—I mean—that is——"

She did not end the sentence.

He had scarcely heard the last words. His look was fixed upon the lighted window, and there was a burning fire of impatience in the look. She interpreted it aright and ran off.

"I will let her know," she said, vanishing into the house.

He remained standing where she had left him. And then a strange thing happened. To his dying day he could never, from personal experience, recall anything quite so strange. He had not taken his eyes from the lighted window, and as he kept looking up at it a shock of doubt, of wonderment, and of

swift suspicion struck him all at once. For—there could be no doubt of it—a couple of shadows had appeared on the blind, and one of them was the shadow of a man.

The flame of jealousy, of disgust, of sudden disbelief in her, blazed up hotly, and then as suddenly died down. What if it were a man? A few minutes before everything had seemed normal; the cooling breath of the Australian night had steadied him, and made him once more a rational being—or at least had made him believe that he was. But he must surely be getting hysterical if the mere passing of a shadow across a window-blind could produce a sensation and a start like this. After all, such things had been heard of before. The women of the French salons, the Recamiers and Scudérys had done that kind of thing for generations, and had done it at all hours of the night and morning. No one had thought any the worse of them. There *might* be no harm in it.

It seemed that his messenger was a long time coming back. What on earth was detaining her? It was scarcely kind, or considerate of the girl to linger when she must know that time was going on, and that every minute wasted made his position worse, and the chance of obtaining an interview that night proportionately less.

But—there it was again! A shadow moving rapidly across the blind—two shadows—a sudden coming together—a starting apart—what looked like

a brief struggle—what sounded like a muffled cry. At first the watcher was inclined to doubt the evidence of his senses, but this was not fancy. He was not dreaming ; he was wide awake.

He checked the first impulse to call out, strong though that impulse was. After all, what if this was only another development of Miss Rayment's freakish humour? What if she were merely romping with someone? Shadows on a blind could easily cut strange and fantastic shapes. And what an insufferable position would be that of the one who raised an alarm when no alarm was needed !

He came closer to the side of the house, and strained eyes and ears in the endeavour to get some clue. He heard a slight sound as if of shuffling feet, and then silence. There was a short defiant laugh—a *man's* laugh. He could make nothing of the voice ; even if it had been familiar, the harsh unnatural utterance would probably have disguised it. But it was a man's laugh—that was quite certain—and it was a man's voice that followed with the words which he could just catch :

“ I'm coming back again.”

And hard upon that promise, or rather threat, came the answer in a tone of suppressed fury :

“ I will kill you if you do.”

There was another laugh, and then a door slammed. That was all. No one was seen to come out of the house. The intruder, whoever he was, had remained within, or had made his escape by some side exit.

Presumably he knew the house well. Perhaps he was staying there all night. Perhaps he was a member of the family, some relation who had quarrelled with Miss Rayment over some trifling matter, and had thus been the cause of this sinister-looking affair.

But that suggestion was untenable, though the watcher outside clung to it for a moment in the desire to find some reasonable explanation, some excuse for these inexplicable events. He knew that relatives did not disagree in that fashion. The words were not those of mere temporary vexation. The two chief actors in that shadow-pantomime were not playing with each other. Never in his life had he heard anything more fearfully earnest than those few muttered words: "I will kill you if you do."

To think of it! Had he, Arthur Ward, a practical man and no dreamer, been permitted a glimpse of a mysterious tragedy of real life? There were such things. The sensational novelist had not a monopoly of them. Men and women who put the bravest face forward had their skeletons under lock and key. But until now no evidence of anything of the kind had come under his own notice. How was it that the passing of a figure in front of a window had seemed to pull back the curtain of a tragic world?

In a few seconds the whole field of conjecture had been swept, and he had got back to the starting-point. Surmise must end. What was the

use of it? As for this woman whom he had come out to see, it was pretty clear now that she was unscrupulous, probably a wanton who held midnight meetings with a lover in her own room. Well, even if she were that—and it was about as low a pass as any woman could come to—what had it to do with him? Was he the Almighty to sit in judgment on her—he, who had no right to be where he was, and had been base enough to come prying on her? It was true he had longed to see her. Her passing tenderness, even though it was feigned tenderness, had meant a great deal, and now the delirium had passed—he had fancied it had passed before; but there was no doubt about it this time. It was impossible to think that any power in earth or heaven, or the other place, could bring it back. He felt older, wiser, sadder, and yet in some fashion more intent.

His messenger had returned. The door opened noiselessly, and there she was. In reality it was not more than five minutes. Everything including his own heated fancies had passed and repassed in that time. He expected no favourable reply, and was not at all sure that he wanted one. The folly of having sent a message at all, and the certainty of being subjected to a refusal struck him now with a sense of anger—not with her, but with himself.

“I’m afraid it is no use,” the girl explained, “I knocked and waited, but I could not get anyone to reply.”

"Thanks, I ought not to have troubled you. I am deeply sorry. But tell me one thing—who was it came out of the room while you were waiting?"

In the dim light, which was partly starlight, and partly thrown from the window above, he could see her looking at him in surprise.

"Who was it?" she repeated, "I saw no one."

"What!" His voice was almost a shriek. Was she another of them then—was this gentle, serious, sweet-eyed girl as expert a liar as the other one?

"I saw no one come out," she said again, "but there are two doors, and someone might have gone out the other way without my seeing."

"Did you hear anything?"

"I thought I heard voices in the room, but I did not listen closely."

"Does Miss Rayment often have visitors in her room?"

"Yes, often. Why do you ask?"

"At this hour?"

"Sometimes."

He looked at her—at first with frank unbelief, but gradually with less distrust, and ultimately with something like conviction. If this girl could lie to his face like that, which he would not believe, then the whole world was one incarnate lie. Half apologetically, and much in the tone of a penitent who has turned from his sins and become wise, he said,

Let me thank you for what you have done; if I

don't come this way again, try and forget the fright and trouble I have caused you."

"Shall I give Miss Rayment any message in the morning?"

"No, not from me. Good night."

He walked away. For the first time that evening he was conscious of physical fatigue. The excitement that had kept him so long on his feet had vanished. He dragged himself down to the water. Would it not be better to leave the boat where it was and take the ferry back?

The question had hardly shaped itself when his attention was arrested. The splash of oars was distinctly audible. There was nothing unusual in that—watermen were abroad on the harbour at all hours—but the voices did not seem to be those of watermen. They sounded like the voices of a pleasure party.

He stood back from the jetty light. It was a small and struggling light which threw light for the space of not more than a few yards. There might be people on the incoming boat whom he knew, and he preferred not to be recognised. He did not wish to spy on them, but neither did he wish them to question him. It might look as though he were coming from Rayment's house, and if by any chance the fact were known that Rayment was away from home while the daughter was not, some altogether unwarranted conclusions might be drawn. But he was not prepared for what followed. The boat came

within the faint circle of light which the lamp threw out to sea. It contained three men, but it was so dark that it was impossible to make out their faces. The splash of oars ceased, and a familiar voice called out,

“Hullo! There’s another boat lying alongside!”

It was his brother *Bertie’s* voice—his brother, with whom he had not exchanged a word since the day of the race. Was there to be no end of these night surprises? And what in the name of all that was wonderful were they doing there at that hour? What extraordinary coincidence had brought it about that, on the very night when he had happened to take a pleasure boat, they should take one and come here too? He remained in the shadow. Most decidedly he was not going to reveal himself yet. To do so he would have to give some explanation of his presence, and that was out of the question.

The boat was made fast, and the occupants stepped out. They stood together in a group on the jetty, three figures dimly outlined against the black water. One of them struck a match and lighted a cigarette. Every word could be heard distinctly.

“Well,” inquired one in a bantering tone, “where are we going to now?”

“This is my way,” answered Bertie, moving off the jetty towards the Park. “Meet you later on if you like. I have a bit of business to transact first.”

“Come with us,” said the man who had not yet

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spoken. "If it's a woman I'm dashed if I'd bother about her at this hour."

The boy laughed.

"I will meet you at the Royal Oak in, say, an hour's time—that will be eleven o'clock."

"Right, we will be there."

They disappeared in the dark.

Bertie walked rapidly along the path leading to the right, and in a couple of strides was out of sight.

* * * * *

When, in after years, Arthur Ward sought to recall the events of that day there was much that he could not remember. Much of what happened in broad daylight from the time of receiving Miss Rayment's telegram to the time of starting out on his row across the harbour, was a blank. There were just one or two incidents of the night that were stamped on his brain. For years afterwards he could see on the blind of every lighted window two moving figures in a grim shadow-pantomime; for years afterwards he could hear, whenever he shut his eyes, a mocking laugh and a voice of concentrated rage; for years afterwards, whenever he went down to the water's edge by night, he could see a group of three spectral forms outlined against the water; could hear the same boyish voice that he knew so well sounding in his ears.

The culminating tragedy was also remembered.

After the three men had separated and gone their different ways, he believed that he had stood for some time hesitating. What his state of mind was he could not subsequently recollect. But he knew that instead of jumping into his boat and pushing off he had remained at the edge of the jetty waiting—waiting for he knew not what, waiting possibly for Bertie to return, waiting, at all events, with a chill unknown fear, which he could not explain.

Crack !

A pistol shot from the house on the hill should not have sounded very loud at that distance, but to the listener's excited ear it seemed as if the whole of Heaven's artillery had opened fire. It started him running in the direction from which the sound came. He ran without knowing that he was running, bursting through the gate, rushing over the grass and under the trees, tearing past the front of the house—from which new lights were beginning to loom on the darkness—and hearing the sound of his own footsteps crash like a regiment of cavalry on the gravel walk. There was violent excitement within ; there was a scream from a woman's lips, and someone was opening the front door. But Arthur rushed over something that was lying prone on the grass, and either stumbled, fell or flung himself down beside it. The people from the house must have come running out immediately, but what they did with him or with *it* he never knew.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LAWYER AND THE LADY.

“OW did it happen, my poor boy?”—When the morning papers, among their list of sensations, conveyed the news of the tragic discovery on the northern side of the harbour, there was a general impression among those acquainted with him, that young Ward had gone to his death by his own act. The details published in the first instance were very meagre. The fact that Rayment and his circle were anxious to avoid a scandal, and the knowledge that the feelings of innocent people were likely to be involved—perhaps, also, the reflection that it would be wiser to say little until the truth were known—led the newspapers to refrain from over elaboration, or from any attempt to invite curiosity or suspicion. It seemed likely enough, in the absence of a definite statement to the contrary, that the lad had sought the desperate man’s refuge from disappointment, that he had ended his financial troubles, and his once promising career, by firing a bullet into his brain.

But after the magisterial inquiry such an impression could not continue—medical evidence showed that the wound could not be self-inflicted, that the bullet must have been fired from a distance of fully five yards or more. There was the further fact that no weapon was found in the dead man's hand or anywhere near the body. Moreover, young Ward was understood to have no enemies in the accepted phrase; he was in fact no one's enemy but his own—and thus a motive for his destruction was absolutely wanting.

For a day or two after the result of the inquiry was made public, there was all the excitement attendant upon a first-class sensation. Afterwards the general interest began to die down, but it was suddenly revived by the startling announcement that an arrest had been effected, and that the person implicated was no other than the Labour demagogue and agitator who was known far and wide throughout the city under the name of Le Mercier.

This was indeed a peculiar development, and was received at first with scornful incredulity. What could there possibly be to connect Le Mercier with such an affair? What conceivable interest could such a man, who was regarded as too dissolute and noisy to harbour criminal instincts, have in young Ward's death? Unless there was a woman at the bottom of the whole business? This last reflection set the gossips wondering. They had made some progress with mental search for this

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unknown woman, when the news came that the prisoner under arrest had confessed to the crime, and then it was felt with a certain sense of disappointment that the bubble of a promising and a growing mystery—the kind of mystery which the average man or woman dearly loves—was being dissipated into thin air.

Le Mercier in his confession admitted that he had fired the fatal shot, but with no intent and under misapprehension. He had, he said, come over by the ferry-boat in order to bring a message to the Minister—whose confidential and secret adviser he declared himself to be—and hearing a step in the dark, and suspecting that robbery with violence was intended, he had fired in order to scare the intruder away. He added that he was not perfectly sober at the time. In his hastiness and alarm he had not aimed high as he had intended, and the awful result was what the Court knew. When reminded that Rayment was not in town on the night of the occurrence, he swore that Rayment had assured him that he would be back that evening. This last statement Rayment himself offered to come forward and confirm.

At the trial the Crown Prosecutor declared his entire disbelief in the man's story. He discredited it in every way, ridiculed it to the jury, and protested against it as a thin subterfuge to escape a trial for wilful murder. For a time it looked as if things would go hard with the author of the confession, and

that the gallows were not a remote prospect. He owed his salvation principally to Barraclough, who appeared for the defence, and contended strenuously that there was not a shadow of motive to convict Le Mercier of a wish for the young man's death. The astute gentleman representing the Crown there-upon changed his ground, he hinted indirectly, but with quite sufficient plainness, that the confession was intended to screen someone else. Further, he insisted upon the possible, nay the probable and morally certain influence of the "eternal feminine" upon the tragedy in question, and declared that the ends of justice would never be met until more was known of the part played by two of the women in the house on the night of the fatal occurrence. He demanded that the hearing should be adjourned for a month, until the detectives could make further inquiries.

This gave the opposing counsel an opening of which he took the fullest advantage. There was a point, he assured the jury, up to which patience was a virtue, but beyond which it must give way to another and a very different feeling. Was there to be no limit to the insinuations thrown out in this reckless manner? Was a crime of violence to be laid at the door of those whose names were associated in the minds of all of them with the highest attributes of gentleness and womanly virtue? Were the two ladies who had so unfortunately been compelled to submit to a trying

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ordeal—the most trying ordeal that any woman could undergo—the ordeal of a rigorous examination in regard to a violent and bloody death—were they to receive, he would not say sympathy, but no vestige of justice or fair play from the learned gentleman who was appearing on the other side? Of course his learned friend was privileged. Outside a court of law such insinuations would not be tolerated for a moment. But even in a court of law a man had no right to say such things unless he were prepared to prove them. Personally, he desired to enter his most emphatic protest against such wanton, such damaging, such calumnious suggestions, as had just emanated from a leading member of the Bar—suggestions, he repeated, that were unsupported by one jot or tittle of evidence.

This earnest and well-timed appeal carried the day. The Court found that Herbert Ward had met his death by misadventure, and discharged Le Mercier. In giving the latter his liberty, the Judge remarked that he might consider himself extremely fortunate. He added significantly: "The jury has taken an exceptionally lenient view of your position in this matter. Men of your stamp are a danger to the community. I warn you that further inquiries may be made into these proceedings, and should any new evidence come to light you may find yourself in a very different position from the one you are in now."

Le Mercier said nothing either on this occasion or

on any other during the inquiry. Strangely enough the drunken loafer and agitator element seemed to have disappeared. The dissipated, insolent look which habitually disfigured him, had disappeared also. He accepted the stinging judicial comment without a word. When the verdict left him free he walked away from the Court in the same unmoved fashion, without a trace of boastfulness or anything that looked like pleasure at his escape—with precisely the same expression of serious reserve that he had worn throughout the whole proceedings.

He walked away, and the loungers outside the Court who watched him go, spat and smoked meditatively for a minute or two, made a few disparaging remarks about him, and then turned their attention to something else. The incident in which he had been a central figure was closed.

There was one other individual who might have shown some elation at the result, but who did not. Barraclough was not a man who advertised. He was more fortunate than most of the members of his profession, in that he did not need to. No one expected that his triumph—and it was admitted on all sides that it had been a signal triumph—would have much outward effect upon him. As a matter of fact it had none whatever. He never spoke of it either to his intimates or to any of the people at whose houses he visited. Yet he was not one of those who kept all his wares for the professional window. He believed that he owed at

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least as much to his entertainers as they owed to him. He liked to talk—to women if they were sympathetic, to men if he had time and they had intelligence. The fact that he was a bachelor and had turned forty had won him the reputation—among those who did not know him—of being morose. Few suspected how strong his social instincts really were.

A house at which he was often to be found was Mrs. Harper's. He made his way there one Saturday afternoon, a week or two after the court case had ended. It was not her usual day at home, but it was almost a foregone conclusion that there would be visitors. He accordingly went rather late, in the hope that by the time he arrived most of them would have left. It was a dull, grey afternoon, rather colder than it usually is during the mild Sydney winter. The house lay back from the road, and was so obscured by trees as to be almost invisible from the entrance. Two or three people were coming away as he reached the front door.

He was pleased to find his hostess alone. Not that he objected to others ; far from it. The people that one met at this house were as a rule capable of arousing interest. But as a matter of choice he would rather talk with her than talk with her guests.

He had taken a chair and pushed it back from the fire. It was getting dusk. The logs threw out

a genial warmth, though the temperature of the room scarcely required it. His hostess seated herself on a lounge at his left, looking across at him with pleased interest. She knew Barraclough better than most people, and had a genuine liking and admiration for him. Moreover, unlike many other women, she was not in the least overawed by him.

"I have been wanting to talk to you," she said, "about lots of things, but I thought I would never get the chance. It was very good of you to find time to call when so many people are running after you, and when you have so many more interesting things to do."

"What if I said there were few things I liked so well?"

"Well"—with a smile—"if you choose, I will consider it said."

"I meant it. I like talking to you. Why should I deny it? For one thing you never say 'Wa'll' when you mean 'Well.'"

"Do I ever mean otherwise?"

"That's unworthy of you. I have listened in vain for the twang which one usually associates with your charming countrywomen."

"Perhaps you don't know them."

"Perhaps! But I have met a few."

"What class of woman have you not met?"

"I? Not very many. Absolutely speaking, hardly any. Relatively speaking, perhaps a few."

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"I should like to hear some of your experiences."

"If I said I never had any experiences? Or none worth speaking about?"

"I wouldn't believe you. Just look at yourself. Look at your eyes—they are not hard, or narrow, or cold, or selfish, or anything like that. Look at your mouth—look at the curves round the corners. Look at your hands, too; they are soft and sensitive enough to be a woman's."

"And the crows' feet," he interrupted; "what have they done that they shouldn't be looked at as well."

"Oh, I am not blind. You can't tell a woman that you have never thought of anything but law-books, Mr. Barraclough. You couldn't expect us to believe you there."

"Really," he answered, still gazing into the fire and smiling, "I am flattered indeed that any sins I have ever committed in the past, or may be about to commit in the future, should be of sufficient interest to you to cause you to speculate about them."

She looked at him with an indefinable expression—an expression that might have meant curiosity or disbelief, or personal interest, perhaps all three.

"I give you up. But one of these days when you are tired of your club and your law-books, and your men friends, and your legal dinners, and your country visits, you will be glad to come to me and tell me all about it."

"About what?"

"About the woman that mattered—the one you used to know."

There was just a shade of seriousness in his strictly non-committal attitude. "Yes, if I did happen to strike that confidential mood—and this room and this half light are eminently suited for confidences—I should prefer above all things to pour the tale into your sympathetic ear. I assure you, a man of my age appreciates the compliment such a listener pays him."

"Your age! Fiddle-de-dee! Why, a great man isn't a great man at all until he is sixty. Gertrude Atherton says so."

His laugh was amused and scornful, but had no bitterness, or disappointment—the laugh of a man who could accept things as they were, and not whine over them. "*Eheu fugaces*," he exclaimed, leaning carelessly back in the chair; "*non sum qualis eram*—I am not what I used to be, dear lady. At the risk of appearing pedantic, I don't see why Horace—I've done my eight lustrums as well as he—I don't see why Horace should have a monopoly of all these phrases."

"It is then," she inquired archly, "a case of *rursus bella moves*?"

"Good! I see I need not have apologised. But the answer to your question is a negative. The old song gets to ring hollower as time goes on."

There was a pause, and then his hostess said,

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"There is something I must speak to you about."

"Not about what happened three or four weeks ago?"

"Yes. I haven't seen you—not like this—since the trial. I am not going to pay you any compliments. You needn't think I am. You should hear the things the Judge's daughter says about you."

The last remark was thrown out with some adroitness. She thought that if there were a weak spot in his armour, this would prove it. Like most women, she was impressed by the man's intellect, and even more by his public success. It was irritating that he should be so invulnerable. It would be a distinct triumph for the sex if some woman could be found to drag this modern Hector three times round the social market-place.

But he had got back to his impersonal manner. The reference to the Judge's daughter shut him up like an oyster. The look he gave her in response to hers was absolutely without prejudice.

"I suppose it bores you to be made a hero of?"

"If I have your good opinion, I am satisfied."

"Did I deserve that artificial compliment? I wanted to ask you about some of the people mixed up in that affair, and especially about that poor Mr. Ward. Have you seen or heard anything of him since? I wrote him a note asking him to come here, but I have received no answer. Can't

they get him away somewhere and keep him from brooding over things as they say he is doing?"

"Who are 'they'?"

"My husband, for one. He called upon him professionally at his lodgings the day before the trial, and his report was that there was nothing the matter with him physically, but he was suffering from acute mental depression, that might turn to chronic melancholia. Those were the words. He said the best thing would be to get him away for a thorough change."

"It was your husband's evidence that enabled me to have him kept out of the witness-box, though as a matter of fact I have known witnesses in a much worse plight made to come forward."

"I suppose they would have asked him all sorts of questions?"

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders. "Probably; it's a way they have. But whether they would have got answers or not, I don't know."

She gave up skirmishing in favour of a direct attack. "Don't you honestly think that the truth never came to light?"

"That is a question I can't answer. If you wish me to separate my legal opinion from my private opinion, I'm not sure that I could do it. It's a dangerous thing to do in any case."

"You mean, dangerous to tell me?"

"I didn't say that. I didn't mean it. I mean dangerous to tell anyone—dangerous to tell even

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one's self. But there is one feature of the whole business that does puzzle me, I admit. It is the way that man Le Mercier conducted himself. He always struck me as a bad lot, and I don't know that I have any cause to alter that opinion. But he cut a more presentable figure in the box than I had expected. And his absolute refusal to say anything that might incriminate anybody—well, it came as a surprise."

"You don't think he was telling the truth?"

"That I can't say."

"I know it's not fair to bother you. If I am abusing the privileges of friendship, you must forgive me."

"To talk of something more interesting, have you heard anything from the Rayments since they started for the old country?"

"Only a short note from Maud, written from Freemantle. She says the first week on board was hateful, and that the weather going across the Bight was simply hideous; but she expects to have a gay time when they get to Paris. I confess I never quite understood that girl. I don't know anyone else who did, either."

"And yet you were intimate friends."

"Isn't it the privilege of intimate friends to misunderstand each other?"

"A feminine privilege—I dare say."

"There speaks the cynical bachelor again."

"Let his advancing years excuse him."

She shook her head.

"If you were really a victim to those advancing years, you would not talk about them."

"A purely *ad captandum* argument. But will Rayment be back in time for the General Election?"

"I don't know for certain. I thought it was understood they have let the house for six months."

"I suppose there were no inquiries—from Miss Rayment?"

"About whom?" queried the lady.

"I don't mean anyone in particular. They did say—I expect it was mere idle talk—that Ward was one of her victims. The elder one, I mean. Even if it were true I should say he was cured by this time."

She sighed.

He turned his head quickly.

"What was the sigh for? If he is indeed cured—and was not a man that required to be cured, which I don't assert—would not that be something to be *pleased* over? But you are like all other women; you can never bear to hear of anyone falling out of love with you—if he has once been so fortunate, or unfortunate, as to fall in."

"I am sorry for him. I am sorry for any young man like him, when he loses all hope and interest in the world."

"I believe he is in a bad way," said Barraclough. "But there is no reason why he should not come round again. I believe he will. He ought to.

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Some of us have been in just as bad a way, and yet we pulled through."

"Do you mean that you——"

He shook his head smilingly.

"I mean that I must be going on. You have a fatal facility for making the time pass."

"I suppose it's no use asking you to stay to dinner? My husband ought to be in any minute now."

"Thanks," he answered, "but I promised to be at Johansen's in half an hour. Expect I shall be able to get a cab at the corner. Good-bye."

"That," he thought to himself, as he paused on the verandah to light a cigarette, "is distinctly one of the most interesting women I know."

"A strange man," she reflected, as she looked into the fire. "I wonder——" but exactly what she wondered was scarcely more definable than the flickering firelight.

He found his cab without having to go far to look for it. The drive was a fairly long one. It took him through busy streets and quiet ones. The vehicle clattered over wooden blocks, round street corners, and along metalled roads. Many people recognised him through the cab windows as he sat, cigarette between his lips, looking straight before him—outwardly a fine study in impassibility, inwardly revolving many things. He was rather glad that he had spent an hour talking to her. It had done him good. She was tactful, and understood things.

Her questions never wearied him. Her feminine curiosity amused him. She knew where to begin, and where to leave off. She had the supreme and rare gift of appearing more interested in her companion than in herself. No, she certainly never bored him. So many people did. If marriage could be excused or justified in any set of circumstances, it would undoubtedly be marriage with a woman like that. She had *mind* and womanly sympathy as well. She was anxious to do a good turn for this young man Ward. Well, the wish did her credit. There could be no selfish motive behind it. And as a matter of fact the man appeared to have ability, and might have done well—might even yet do well if he had a chance. But then so many people had ability—of a certain kind—and might do well if they had the chance.

At any rate he would speak to Johansen about him. Johansen might give him a lift into public life. Most young men at a certain stage seemed to have a hankering after public life. It did not strike Barraclough as a particularly worthy ambition, but still, it might be worse. Johansen was a political force. If Johansen cared to interest himself, he could do a great deal.

* * * * *

The cab stopped in front of the entrance to his club. In ten minutes Barraclough had dressed for dinner, and was in the cab again.

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"Johansen," he said, as he stepped into his host's private apartment after dismissing the driver, and dodging past the drawing-room where some dozen people were assembled, "I want to have a word with you about politics."

Johansen was standing with his back to the fireplace.

"My dear fellow," he said, "if you want to ask me my intentions, the oracle is dumb."

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Barraclough, "as if I didn't know quite enough about them already."

The politician smiled, still standing with his back to the fireplace. He motioned the visitor to help himself to the sherry.

The latter poured himself out a glass. The friendship between Johansen and himself was of long standing.

"If I said that your sherry was better than your politics, you would not be offended?"

"On the contrary, I should take it as a delicate compliment; I should quote Charles II.: 'My sherry is my own choosing; my politics are partly chosen for me.'"

"Isn't that a confession of weakness?"

"I said 'partly.' No man, not even a Gladstone or a Disraeli, can choose all his politics for himself. He's a fool if he tries."

"I was going to ask you if you have happened to come across a young fellow named Ward—"

"Oh, Mr. Barraclough!" exclaimed Mrs. Johansen

bursting into the room, "do come and talk to these people in the drawing-room. I have reserved Miss Dorrington—the Judge's daughter, you know—for you. You shall sit next her at dinner."

The Judge's daughter was beginning to look like his destiny after all. With her conversing he found it true that the hours have wings at their command. But when he got home that night, he remembered with a passing tinge of regret, that, like Pharoah's butler, he had forgotten to say a word to Johansen about the subject he had had in mind.

CHAPTER XV.

SAND.

 O, *I* don't want to see anyone. Tell them to get out." It was Arthur Ward's voice. The knock was repeated.

"Confound it, woman. Don't I tell you——"

A letter was pushed under the door, and there was the sound of a retreating footstep. The sole occupant of the room got up and looked down the stairs. The trail of a vanishing skirt was just visible. He picked up what had been thrust under the door, glanced at the handwriting, and tossed the missive unopened on the bed. Then he went back to his seat at the disordered table and once more buried his head in his arms.

He was in the same position nearly an hour later when she came up the stairs again. Receiving no answer to her knock, she opened the door. She came in, tray in hand, and with a few deft touches cleared a space at the littered and paper-strewn table. This done, she prepared for another retreat.

Her step was on the passage outside when he raised his head.

“Mrs. Garburn!”

The unemotional face and sober black-draped figure were once more in the room.

“I must ask your pardon. I am afraid I spoke hastily when you came up a little while ago. I thought it might have been—anyhow I am sorry.”

“I have fallen pretty low,” he muttered, after she had finally disappeared, “but there is no necessity to talk like a cad to a woman who is trying to earn her own living.”

He drank the tea she had brought, and felt grateful to the woman for bringing it. He rose and went to the window, looking out at the landscape, while the faintest tinge of reviving interest might be seen in the eyes that were heavy and dull.

The clouds were breaking. There would be a fresh breeze blowing down the harbour. The sun would be shining on South Head and the smiling ocean would be flecked with white. There would be a breath of life in Nature and a taste of strong wine in the air. The grass on the shady reaches round Watson's Bay would be soft and springy. The road that leads away from the city would be bright and dustless. The life of the earth would be young and fragrant, and would be calling with the voice of the yet unborn Spring to the myriad forms of life in the air above.

And outside the close, half-darkened, unlovely

room in which he sat, there would be deeps calling under deeps—strong and vibrating hopes growing stronger before they faded (as what hopes did not fade?), and lights of mirth, and lights of love kindling in the busy, animated streets, or illuming the faces of the passers by. And the great city itself, the great, beautiful, resplendent city, washed and shining after the rain of the last twenty-four hours, iridescent and gracious, and decked with millions of glittering dewdrops, having its feet in the waters and its brow on the hill—the city would be as nearly as possible the literal fulfilment of the line in the *Prometheus Unbound*; it would be “laughing with a thousand drops of sunny water to the unpavilioned sky.”

Though he knew all this and felt all this—felt it vaguely and subconsciously, but yet felt it—he knew also that the whole scene was dead so far as he was concerned, and that he had no more interest in Sydney, or in any man, woman, or child in Sydney, than he had in any vanished inhabitant of the moon. It seemed long ages since that row across the harbour. He remembered well enough most of what had led up to the finding of his brother; but all that took place immediately after was a blank. There had been a short, sharp attack of illness—brain fever, he had been told—but it had passed. Thanks to a good constitution and a naturally sound nerve and brain, he was nearly, if not quite, himself again, physically and mentally.

But was he as well mentally? That was not so certain. Was it not possible that one could judge, reason, argue, criticise, weigh anything and everything in the mental scales, could see everything with the mind's eye as clearly as ever before, and yet be destitute of something more important than all the rest?

Mentally? Could a man be sound mentally when he was without the hopes and ambitions and the desires and fears of other men? The position was that of one who possessed a machine meant to float on air, a machine that had floated on air, and was only prevented from floating on air again by the want of that impalpable, invisible something that was necessary to keep it above the ground. What was the use of a physical framework without the buoyant principle behind it? What was the use of a balloon, even a perfectly correct and marvellously constructed balloon, if there was *no hydrogen* and the balloon would not rise?

There may appear to be something astonishing and almost incomprehensible in the spectacle of a man still young, more than ordinarily intelligent, and organically sound, drifting into a slough of despondency, that smothers action and renders hope impossible. Overwhelming grief, or the bitterest disappointment might have such an effect on some natures. But so far as the grief was concerned, there was not that close affinity between Ward and his brother that would tend to make the loss

of the latter an altogether incurable and hopeless regret. Neither was the alienation from Rayment, and Rayment's daughter, with its resulting sense of disappointment and failure, a circumstance that would of itself lead to his present state of despair.

The kind of infatuation that Ward had felt for Miss Rayment was almost entirely of the senses; and yet, though it was of that nature, though it had little or no spiritual life, it was real enough and deep enough. Gladly would Arthur have idealised it and her; willingly would he have persuaded himself that he could meet her on a purely intellectual and impersonal plane—or if not exactly there—on a plane where sense and spirit were finely fused and intermingled. But he knew that he could not. Despite his disbelief in her, the woman could play on him, almost as she liked; and now that she was out of the question, it was impossible to think of kindling a fire at any colder, less splendid shrine.

What was there then worth hoping for or worth striving for? The foolish ambition to get on, to have a lot of brainless people talking about what one did or did not do, to become versed in the ridiculous and sordid game that was called public life—this at any rate had been checked. Perhaps it was just as well. Then why not seek for pleasure, since the so-called serious things of life did not matter? Pleasure! Where was the pleasure? Was it in wine which deadened the senses for a minute, only

to rack them for an hour? Was it in women? Was it in song? When a man is nearly thirty, what is the use of talking to him about pleasure, seeing that he has already tried it all and learned the futility of it all?

But he must rouse himself. How his friends repeated that parrot cry—"Rouse yourself!" What in the devil's name was there to make a man rouse himself? There was no more to be gained by rousing himself and going out than by staying in. He flung himself down on the bed.

He must have gone to sleep again, for, as was evident by the shadow on the blind, the sun was almost vertical, when he was awakened by voices below.

They were not loud voices; and yet the dry, hard tones of that of the woman were audible all over the house. A man's step came up the stairs—not a heavy step, but the step of one accustomed to tread warily. There was a knock at the door. The occupant of the room did not answer it, hoping that the intruder, whoever he was, would go away. But instead of doing so, the intruder turned the handle and walked in.

Arthur raised his head languidly upon his arm.

"Sharpe," he exclaimed, dully blinking at the new comer, "who on earth would have thought of seeing you here?"

The newspaper man stood for a moment with his walking-stick and gloves in one hand, and his

hat in the other. His thin face evinced neither curiosity nor surprise. He seated himself in the chair nearest the door, and looked across the room at Arthur, who had sat up on the bed, his hair in disorder, his eyes wide open, his face sallow and darkly lined.

"I suppose," said the man in the chair, "my note never reached you?"

With a sudden impulse of memory Arthur fumbled on the quilt beside him.

"This must be it," he said, "but I haven't opened it."

He proceeded to do so.

"No matter; it was only to say I intended to call round. I would like for business' and other reasons to have a word with you."

"Business' and other reasons! I am afraid you have come to the wrong shop if you want to talk business with me. But excuse me a minute."

He got up and raised the blind an inch or two, half letting in the sunlight, and revealing more plainly the unusual pallor of his face. He poured some water into a basin and plunged his head into it. The sudden shock revived him. He produced a bottle and two glasses from a cupboard.

"Help yourself," he said to Sharpe as he applied a towel to his much-disordered hair. "There's a clean glass, and there's a bottle in front of you. It might be a graceful thing to apologise for the state of the room. It doesn't look beautiful, but then no one is

bound to stay in it longer than he likes. No pressure on anyone to remain, I assure you."

He dropped wearily into the only unoccupied chair. A person of quick sensibilities might have taken offence at this reception. But Sharpe was not that person.

"Better knock this off," he remarked, indicating the bottle; "it won't do you any good if you keep on at it."

There was just a tinge of rising colour in the other man's face.

"Thanks, I am much obliged for the advice. A pity you don't seem to like brandy. I'm sorry there isn't anything else on the premises."

Still, with the same unmoved expression, Sharpe reached over to the bottle, poured a little into the glass, and, after diluting with a liberal dose of water, sipped it slowly.

"No prejudice on my part," he remarked.

"Ah, it's a great relief to me to hear that."

"I came to see you——" began Sharpe with much deliberation.

"You did," assented Arthur, with an audible sigh.

"Do you want me to explain why?"

"Just as you please, and provided it won't take too long."

Sharpe looked up with a sudden gleam in his bright, magpie eyes. This reception was so far from being cordial that it was almost wanting in common civility, and he was secretly rather surprised. He

knew Ward but slightly—he had met him once or twice in the *Recorder* office, and had heard a good deal about him since his brother's death—and a want of courtesy was the last thing he would have suspected. He seemed to be on the point of making some meaning and rather emphatic reply, but if that had been his intention he altered it. Perhaps he remembered the part the *Recorder* had played in a recent political disclosure. Perhaps he also remembered that the name of Arthur Ward had been mentioned in the matter. And it did not require much intuition to discover reasons why the man he was speaking to should not care for further dealings with the journal Sharpe represented. Moreover, the face before him told its own tale. It was the face of one who had latterly gone through a great deal, and for whom some allowance could well be made. No wonder the palefaced man before him was impatient ; no wonder his nerves were on edge.

“ It is simply this,” said Sharpe, speaking in the same even tone ; “ we knew—that is to say, I knew—you had been very much in Queer Street lately. I was sorry to hear it. Probably it doesn't matter to you whether I was sorry or not, but anyhow I was.”

There was a pause, but no reply.

“ Best thing you can do is to rouse yourself straight away.”

Arthur, with his head resting on his hand, gave a scornful sound that resembled a laugh.

"Anyone would think you had been talking to Mrs. Garburn. If she has said that once she has said it a hundred times. She must have been priming you."

"The lady with the doleful countenance? We exchanged no confidences. But if she has said it, it's perfectly true."

"Why should I rouse myself? You know quite well there is nothing worth rousing yourself about."

"Rot!" exclaimed Sharpe, producing a cigarette and waxing it carefully. "And you know quite well it is."

Arthur stared at him.

"Now, look here, Sharpe, you didn't come here to talk about my health, or my state of mind either. What is it you want? What axe have you got to grind this time? You might as well say straight out and have done with it."

The other man sat back in his chair.

"You don't believe, then," he said, with more than usual deliberation, "that I am anxious to do you a good turn?"

"No, I don't see why you should be. I don't believe it."

"The strange thing is that it happens to be true. And in doing you this good turn, there is a chance of doing one for myself as well."

"Ah, that's different. That is the horse of the colour I was looking for."

"Damnation! If you're going to talk like that—

but"—with a swift return to his normal manner—"the chief benefits will be yours." He took another sip of the weak brandy and water, and looked over the glass at the other man. "You've got some political leanings?"

"Got what?"

"Political leanings—aspirations, ambitions, whatever you like to call them. You can speak on a public platform, and wouldn't fall down in front of an audience. Well, come to the meeting of the Progressive League on Saturday night. Get up and make a speech."

"I must say," rejoined Arthur, "that's a brilliant idea. Get up and make a speech! A lot of good that would do me, or do them either."

"Wait a minute. You know they will be choosing candidates for the next General Election shortly. You know that? Very well. If you go there and let 'em see you—and talk to 'em—and let it be known for an absolute certainty that you are in earnest—you have a first-rate chance of being chosen as one of their candidates in October. I mean it. There's no need to look as if you were attending your own funeral. They know something of you; they have been hearing a lot about you lately. They know you were mixed up with politics before—before *it* happened. They are not sticks; they have got their sympathies. And I think, in fact I know, that you would have a chance."

"But," exclaimed Arthur, wondering and incredulous

lous, yet with some light of dawning interest in his face, "I always understood they were a Labour crowd."

"So they are, the great majority of them. But they let in others, and if they can get a man who can talk, and will fight their battles for them—a man who is in earnest, mind you, and has got brains—they don't care whether he is a blacksmith or the son of the Great Mogul."

The light played for a moment in the other man's eyes, then died down again.

"No use," he said hopelessly, "they'd stick to their own crowd. I shouldn't have a million-to-one chance with any of them."

"That," said Sharpe, "is where I come in."

"What do you mean?"

"Going on your own you would not have much chance. But with the paper behind you, you would. And I can promise you—conditionally, of course, and with certain reservations—I can promise you we would be ready to back you up."

Arthur got up, thrust his hands into his pockets, and took a couple of turns across the room. After all, this had stirred him more than a month's dosing with quinine and iron could have done. But the old hopelessness, combined with the old suspicion of the man who had made this offer, came back.

"Very good of you," he said, while a sense of obligation struggled with his unbelief, "but where does the benefit to yourself come in?"

"We want to win three city seats at the election. We ought to win three on the advanced Democratic ticket—not the Labour ticket exactly, but something very like it. We are pretty sure of two, and you—you must be the third. There is the fellow McNeill who spouts socialism in the Park; he's been spoken of. We can't stand him at any price. Then there's Hawkins, the brewer: he's the other extreme. Someone betwixt and between, someone whose programme is advanced, but who won't drag the party in the mud—that's what we're looking for. I've mentioned your name to the editor. He didn't take to you much at first, but now he rather likes the idea. Bears no malice towards yourself, I assure you, for anything that may have passed. He only wants you to speak publicly before we decide to do anything. As to the benefit to myself"—he blew a smoke cloud with an exaggerated slowness that was almost painful to watch—"if you are my selection—and you get in—so much the better for me."

"I understand."

There was a pause, and the newspaper man reached for his hat which was lying on the table.

"At any rate, come to the meeting on Saturday. It's an open meeting. We'll expect to see you there, and expect to hear you. I needn't say that all this is strictly between ourselves."

Arthur felt he might have been doing the man an injustice.

"Afraid I was rather uncivil," he said.

"Don't mention it. But I tell you what it is: you must get out and do something. You must liven up. If you don't you'll be in the river or the lunatic asylum before long. What are you going to do to-night?"

"Nothing."

"Meet me outside the Palace at eight. We'll have a look in at the green-room, and I'll introduce you to a couple of friends of mine. Nice girls—clever girls—nothing nasty about them. We'll have a glass of wine together. For your own good, you know. If you don't brisk up and get out of this, you'll be as mad as a hatter before the elections come on. And I don't want to go hunting all over Sydney for another candidate. Remember—eight o'clock."

The thin, shrewd man, with the magpie eyes, had come and gone. But he had left something behind him. He had left some oxygen in the air. Not that his motives were altogether to be trusted. Not that it was possible to believe the cool, calculating brain was genuinely anxious about the success of anything except its own schemes. And yet he had spoken of things that might even yet come to pass. They might—might! Once hoped for, then forgotten, lost sight of, buried fathoms deep under oceans of despairing bitterness, they might yet be realised! And in the meantime what was that about the Palace Theatre and the appointment at eight o'clock? Not because any pleasure was to be expected—and as a matter of fact he was certain

the performance would bore him to extinction—but because Sharpe had asked him, he would go. And he went.

It was a brilliantly-lit theatre, a gay and crowded theatre. For twenty minutes, perhaps for half an hour or more, the only impression one member of the audience had was that there was something bright and glaring in front of him ; something which resembled a great over-coloured drop scene shot across, with moving figures that danced and pirouetted and sang and then vanished, only to be replaced by other figures—or were they the same figures come back ? Whether they were marionettes or flesh and blood, whether they were really singing, or whether the incessant beat and rhythm and swell of sound was from within and not from without, whether the whole spectacle was real, and whether if it was real it signified anything, Arthur Ward for that first twenty minutes or half an hour did not consider. Such was the lingering effect of three months' gloom and isolation, that he did not really know whether what was passing before his eyes was all a phantasmagoria or not.

Gradually the surroundings had their effect. He found himself applauding with the rest of the house a sparkling and effective piece of dancing. It was a voluptuous whirl that began softly and slowly and ended by setting the imagination of the onlookers aflame. After all it was getting interesting. He was not so sorry he had come. And here "she" was

coming back again. Bravo! That was the kind of thing that was wanted. It made you forget. She was going to dance again. No, she was not. Merely a bow, and the curtain was down. The first part was over. He looked at Sharpe, but that inscrutable person showed no sign of enthusiasm. He was not looking at the stage, but seemed to have been carrying on a conversation, chiefly by means of nods and monosyllables, with a third member of the party seated on his left.

The performance had ended ; and the next fact of which Ward was clearly conscious was that he was getting into a four-wheeler outside the Theatre door. The crowd was swarming outside like bees. He got into the cab—his two male companions and two other cloaked figures were inside it already—and they drove away. It was not a long drive. It ended at Mandano's, and the next rising of the curtain—not a stage curtain this time—revealed a brilliantly appointed supper-room, cosily lighted, glittering with glasses, shining with silver ornaments on hospitable-looking tables. His companions, these people with him, were merry and friendly. One of them was the girl whose dancing only a couple of hours before had set the house in a tumult. And one of them—in the circumstances it was a strange meeting—was Geoffrey O'Brien.

The champagne, called for by O'Brien, flowed freely. The laughter from the girls was unforced and musical. O'Brien was the hero of the minute.

Arthur heard the words spoken to Sharpe across the table :

“ Your friend is rather dull to-night.”

Dull ! He was dull, was he ? The word seemed to sting as a much more abusive epithet could never have done. He would let them see whether he was dull. When one came to think of it, there was no excuse for the offence with which he had just heard himself charged. Provided a man were amusing, provided he had something to say and could help to make the time pass, it did not matter what crime he had committed, from bigamy to piracy on the high seas. It did not matter to the company he was in : it was purely an affair between himself and the Crown Law Department. But to be dull ! What a lot of muddy-mettled rascals there were in the world, to be sure ! He was beginning to think he must be one of them. That at any rate must be amended. More wine arrived at his bidding ; and for half an hour, for an hour, he could hear himself talking, laughing, joking, complimenting the girls, bantering the men, scattering all manner of sentiments, some witty, some preposterous, round the table. He could hear answering echoes of laughter : whether they were laughing with him or at him he did not know, and did not much care.

Finally he rose to go ; but he was too unaccustomed, or had been too unaccustomed lately to this kind of thing. It was too sudden a change, and he was obliged to put his hand on the table for support.

"Sit down," exclaimed Sharpe, touching a bell. "Must have one more. It's my turn now."

"No more to-night," said Ward, feeling just a trifle unsteady on his feet. "Don't like to leave you, but I must. Hallo!"

The last was an expression of blank astonishment.

"What is she doing in this gallery?"

The girl had put down the wine that Sharpe had rung for, and as she was leaving the room he caught a glimpse of her face. She had given him one startled look. It was the velvet-voiced singer of a certain memorable occasion.

"Fancy you being here," he said, heedless of the others and ignoring the girl's evident embarrassment. "I'm pleased to see you—I've been ill, you know. Who would have thought—whatever are you doing here?"

The sight of her had brought many things back again. She was leaving the room, and scarcely knowing what he was doing, obeying only a blind impulse, he started towards the door to detain her. His foot must have caught in something; there was a crash, lights danced and went out, and he felt—was it an hour, or a week, or a second afterwards?—that someone was helping to raise him from the floor on which he had ignominiously fallen.

CHAPTER XVI.

COLOURS ON THE LAWN:

“H, my dear, lamented, long-lost Geoffrey, what do you think of me? I haven't written to you since the night we got to Tilbury, and now we are at one of the Swiss Lakes.”

These were the opening sentences of the letter that O'Brien was reading while lounging in the smoking-room of the Melbourne Club.

“I hope you haven't forgotten me, Geoffrey. I must have thought of you on the average at least once a day. It's a beautiful thing, affection—especially in the mild and homœopathic way in which you and I know how to indulge in it. How exhausting it would be if we were violently in love with one another. You wouldn't know yourself, my poor Geoffrey. Yet, only last night I was thinking I would like to see you again. It was on the balcony of this Swiss hotel, looking over the silent lake; and I sighed a quite audible sigh. Mother thought it was a yawn, and said I

ought to go to bed. But I assured her that it wasn't that at all; that it came from the heart and was intended for you. She thereupon became quite alarmed. How charmingly she does misunderstand me, dear mother.

"What a strange, unreal, dreamy, fascinating, delightful, disappointing time it has been! What a crowd of new experiences! What oceans of things to look back upon! And what tons more to look forward to! But yet—and this is the curious part of it—the reality is always a little less than what you expected. It is very nice to look forward to, and nice to look back upon, but while you have got it and are actually taking it in, it doesn't amount to so much. All this sight-seeing must be like drinking absinthe—pleasant in anticipation and pleasant afterwards, but not always pleasant while it is going on. No, that's not an original remark. I won't try to be original until I have got to earn my own living like so many other poor wretches. And if I have to take to writing for a living, I will be as original as they like, and just as shocking as any publisher could desire.

"England—did I tell you what I thought of England? I won't tell you. All you want to know, you know already. You've been here; the facts you can get for yourself, and the impressions you don't care about. You are not quite impressionable enough, my Geoffrey. I must alter

you there. The man who is all impressionism is dreadful, but you go too far the other way. I will be Charles II. to you and you shall be Nell Gwynne—I saw the play in London a fortnight ago. He tells her to darken her left eyebrow a little. For Heaven's sake, Geoffrey, darken the eyebrow of your imagination just a little. Have you read those *Songs before Sunrise* I sent you?

“We stayed in London at the Hotel Cecil. You were there some years ago, so you know all about it. We went to the House of Commons and listened to a debate. We went to the Abbey. We looked at the stones and figures and walls that are as old as William Rufus. We worshipped, or at least, I did, at the shrines of the Plantagenets. I drank in the air of the place till I was intoxicated, and didn't know where I was. I really thought I could see the world moving away from me like the walls of a dissolving house. I really thought I could see the men sleeping there going out to fight. I thought those queer old, heavily-built ships were lying waiting for them in the Channel, ready to sail away to France. I thought I could see them with their armour on, and one of them was just asking me ‘A cup of sack, girl,’ before he started off. I was going to run out and get it. I knew there would be grass growing outside in the London streets. I knew the bonneted Plantagenet women would be waiting with arms at their sides, talking and flirting and smiling like a Rembrandt picture, and

one of them would give me the cup I wanted to take to my hero. I knew all that—I knew nothing else until mamma touched me on the arm, and we were walking along Pall Mall.

“We went to everything. You know what the round is. We went to Major Wrong’s mansion, or rather, palace. He made his money out of Companies. I went to a ball there—none of your cheap and nasty balls, but a real, toney, slap-up affair, with a duke and a duchess turned on to make it respectable, and beautiful lights, and ferns, and mirrors, and uniforms, and silks, and dresses—wonderful, Geoffrey, simply wonderful! And the English women. Oh, these English women! I read somewhere that one virtuous English woman is a match for the whole ten thousand virgins of Cologne. I can quite believe it. You ought to come over here and marry one, and get her to take you in hand. There is only one thing on earth quite so outwardly and severely and respectably virtuous as the middle-class Englishwoman, and that is the English member of the House of Commons. I am judging by the two that we had to dinner here one night. I wanted to meet Mr. Chamberlain, but haven’t had the chance. Father met him somewhere—I think it was in a crush at the Agent General’s—and he told us about it in a very important tone of voice, and said he thought highly of Mr. Chamberlain. I haven’t heard what Mr. Chamberlain thinks of father.

"I have met some of the literary people. They are a curious, mixed lot, these literary Englishmen. One of them who is making nearly five thousand a year by his books, is the quietest and most modest man you ever saw. Such a fine forehead, and such deep, quiet eyes. A man who doesn't advertise. They try to lionise him, but it's no use; he simply won't be lionised. I met him at a garden party where there were lots of Colonials, and when he found that I didn't want to stare at him, or to pump him with questions about himself, he was willing to talk. And I listened. That is the really great man for you. But there are such hundreds of the other sort—men who have been to Oxford and Cambridge, and who have nothing to do, and think they might as well do it by scribbling articles for papers, and bringing out what they call novels. Fleet Street is alive with them. One of this kind called to see me three days running at the Cecil. The first day he came he told me that his book on—'Haw!—"The Seventh Commandment," or something like that—was—Aw! coming out in Decembah!' The third time he came, he sat in a chair in our private drawing-room, sucked the end of his stick and simply stared at me. Just to say something, I asked him if he found me interesting. What do you think he said? 'Vewy interesting—Australian type always is—might want to put you in a book, don't you know.' I told him quite plainly that he could look for

his types somewhere else, and that I was afraid I wouldn't be at home much in the future. And he didn't call again.

"I had a fright the other day. I thought I was old. This has nothing to do with what I have been writing about, but that is the beauty of writing letters—you needn't bother about the connections. I might write a book some of these days if one hadn't to worry so much about the connections. But I thought I was old. It was in the English country. You know the town of Sevenoaks, in Kent, with its trees, and hedges, and grass, and more trees, and more hedges, and more grass. Only about twenty miles from London, but what a change! We were staying there for a few days, and I went for a walk by myself in Knole Park. It was autumn—the saddest, strangest, loveliest time of the year. Shall I ever forget it, that walk in the woods in the English autumn? You know those leaves that Shelley writes about—you don't know, but that doesn't matter—yellow and black, and hectic red, the "pestilence-stricken" multitudes of them? They were falling, falling, falling everywhere as if a pestilence really had struck them, and the winds were whispering that sad, mysterious whisper we don't hear in Australia, because the leaves don't fall. And the bare branches of the trees were just beginning to show themselves, and there were all sorts of sighings and murmurings, and the breath that came up from the north was icy cold. I knew

that these wonderful old English woods had been English woods for hundreds of years before the Normans came. I knew they were fading and dying, but I knew that in the spring they would grow beautiful again. And I felt old, old, old, Geoffrey—I was thirty if I was a day.

“But Paris—Paris revived me. I was nineteen all the time I was in Paris. Did I ever confess to you that I was twenty-eight? Foolish if I did, because, even now, in the good, broad daylight I don’t look a bit more than twenty-six. And to think that I have gone through so—but that isn’t what I was writing about.

“Paris, Paris, Paris. I simply write it down for the pleasure of writing it—simply to make you jealous in your little Sydney or Melbourne over there. I expect you are in Melbourne, as Cup time will be due when this reaches you. And you think there are pretty girls and pretty dresses at Flemington, do you? You think the geraniums are lovely around the grand stand, and the view over the Salt-water is very fine and large? It’s twelve months since I was at Flemington, so I can’t be expected to remember. But didn’t you like Paris? Didn’t you really *love* Paris? What did you think of Versailles? Didn’t you realise that you were in another world when you took your first stroll in the Champs Elysées? And didn’t you—even you, my practical, unromantic Geoffrey—feel a thrill of some kind when you stood on the site of the old Bastille? I

don't expect you did. You liked the Opera House best. And even there we had the advantage of you. We heard Cavalieri sing. I sat in the box, and two Frenchmen who spoke perfect English sat on either side of me; and what with the lovely music and the lovely building and the lovely idiotic compliments they paid me—while mamma was kind enough to talk to some other woman on the other side of her—what with all this, I felt pleased enough and happy enough and wicked enough to break all the Ten Commandments at a smash.

“Adieu! Geoffrey, perhaps for only a little while. We have been in Holland, and after doing Switzerland will go on to Venice and then home. I seem to have crowded all sorts of things into the last few weeks, but I am not out of love with Australia. I am not out of love with you, Geoffrey. You are not a genius—at least, you don't pretend to be one—but I should die if I had to marry a genius. And if”—(the words, “circumstances permit” lined out, and “you think the same” written above them)—“if you think the same, there is no knowing what the fates may hold for us two.

“Your affectionate

“MAUD.

“P.S. Is it true that that peculiar man—what's his name?—Le Mercier, has mysteriously disappeared? What do you think has become of him? Has our friend Mr. Ward quite recovered his health and spirits again?”

This letter was in O'Brien's pocket, and its contents were metaphorically running through his head when he stepped into a cab that afternoon and directed the driver to Government House. The impressionist portion of it did not affect him one way or the other. It was not the kind of letter that he would have written himself, and that about the Frenchmen in the box was—er, well, it might have been left out. But when a fellow likes that sort of girl, he supposed he had to expect that sort of thing.

But if he was not a genius, O'Brien was, within his own compass, not a fool. He had a thoroughly good idea that the postscript was not thrown in by accident. In fact, he was tolerably well satisfied that the mind of the writer was running more on those two or three lines of postscript than on London or Paris or Switzerland, or any of the other topics with which she had covered these pages.

She had mentioned no one, asked after no one, except those two. Who on earth was this fellow Le Mercier? And why did she write as if she had forgotten his name, when she knew it as well as her own? That she knew more about him than the public at large, O'Brien had long been convinced, but *how much* she knew was a mystery. It was a dashed nasty business altogether, and he didn't like to think about it. That a girl like Maud Rayment—a girl whom he had serious thoughts of marrying, by

Jove!—should have had anything to do with this fellow, was not pleasant to contemplate. He was willing to give her the benefit of the doubt, but he didn't like the look of it at all. As to the other man, it was reasonable, perhaps, that she should ask after him. He dare say she was sorry for the poor beggar. O'Brien was sorry for him himself. Not a nice thing to have a brother killed like that. Must give a man a shock that he wouldn't get over in a hurry.

The idea struck O'Brien as the cab carried him over Princes Bridge and along the St. Kilda Road, that Johansen and Barraclough and one or two other big men that he knew would be at Government House that afternoon. They were all over from Sydney for the Cup, and would be certain to be at the Garden Party. He might mention Ward's name to them. They were men of money and influence; they could easily do anyone a good turn if they wished to. Geoffrey knew quite well that Ward was too proud to ask for favours himself. It was rather queer, when one came to think of it, that he should be putting himself out for the sake of a man who didn't belong to his own set. It was the sort of thing a fellow might do when he was recovering from an illness, or was feeling weak in the head, or had just won a big bet at the races. No one of these contingencies had lately happened to himself. He concluded there could be only one motive. He must be even more anxious to please

Maud Rayment and more struck on her than he had imagined.

With this solution of the problem before him, and with the unaccustomed benevolent impulse still uppermost in his mind, he drove through the gates.

The people he had been reckoning upon were all there. It was the gayest and most representative crowd of the season. The gathering represented all parts of Australia; but all those present were included in one or another of three classes. They were, first, the people who were something—people like the visiting Governors, occasional sprigs of English nobility, and here and there a baronet or two; they were, secondly, the people who had done something—people among whom were successful politicians, barristers, and other professional men; they were, thirdly, the people who owned something—people among whom was included Geoffrey himself.

It was a great feminine festival. Every woman who had come to this Garden Party as well as some hundreds who had expected to come, but whom the Aide-de-camp had absent-mindedly passed over, had expended hours and days in a study of shades and harmonies. The fate of so much had depended on so little. Instead of being bright, the day might be cloudy. And to be ideally perfect the costume had to match not only the gloves and the sunshade, but the colour of the day. Hundreds of women,

who would not have risked more than half-a-crown on the Melbourne Cup Race, had plunged recklessly on the chances of clear weather. And in this instance they had won. It was a carnival of mixed pretentiousness and daintiness and vulgarity and refinement—but what carnival is not? A peacock-like display of social feathers, unredeemed by heart or soul or intellectual meaning—but what big social function, whether in the New World or in the Old, is not the same? O'Brien, for one, was satisfied with the prospect, and satisfied with his own part of it. The unpleasant habit of moralising had never taken possession of him. He plunged into the crowd, keeping an eye open for those whose attention he wanted to attract.

Meanwhile a group of three, all persons of some distinction in a fairly wide circle, were talking together on a less frequented part of the lawn. O'Brien did not notice them. If he had he might have hesitated to come forward, for while one of them was Johansen and another Barraclough, the third was the visiting Governor of New South Wales.

"It is not for me to urge you, Mr. Barraclough," said the Governor, "but we are speaking in confidence, and I should like very much to see experience and ability properly represented in the Commonwealth Parliament. As one who stands outside party, but is really fond of this country and wishes it well, I feel bound to say as much, even at the

risk of being called to account by some of your professing democrats if I said it publicly."

"Your Excellency is never anything but discreet," answered Barraclough, with studied politeness.

"Ah!" responded His Majesty's representative, "I thought we had agreed that on every Imperialist there reposed at present most pressing responsibilities."

"I am afraid it's no use," chimed in Johansen "I have told him a dozen times that he ought to come forward, if not for the State House, at least for the Federal Parliament. Next year there will be a new order of things—bigger questions, bigger responsibilities, bigger men. At least, I hope there will be bigger men."

"I am an Englishman and perhaps prejudiced," went on the Governor; "correct me if I am. But it certainly strikes me, as an Englishman, that a section of your people are getting too much power. Of course, one mustn't say what section. Perhaps in the old country, we require some shaking up; perhaps our Liberal and Conservative lines are a trifle stereotyped. But here it does seem to me you are going too far—I am afraid much too far."

Johansen closed his lips firmly while this was being said, and looked far in front of him. He had the look of a man thinking over problems of vast import. There was this peculiarity about Johansen that even when speaking about small matters to a small audience on a small platform he could com-

mand the expression of an Emperor surveying contending armies. His friends adored him for this trait in his character, and his enemies wondered how he did it.

"If," he went on, still with the same fine look from under the fine forehead, "if I have any voice in the destinies of united Australia, I shall endeavour to prevent any Party from going to extremes."

"And what about you, Mr. Barraclough," persisted the Governor, "isn't it possible to inspire you with imperial, if not with political, enthusiasm? Knowing what you must know—seeing what you must have seen—a man of your ability, too."

The recipient of these attentions shook his head with a deprecating smile.

"You are too kind."

"You are still young; you have your life in front of you."

"You are much too kind—and too mistaken."

The Governor laughed. "Well, we needn't discuss it further. I shall hope to hear of you when the first Federal Ministry—or, if not that, the second—is being formed. Ah, they are coming. That is the worst of being a man in my position—solitude *à deux* or even solitude *à trois* is a luxury almost unknown to us."

There was a babel of voices, and the three were carried in different directions.

"How do you do, Mr. Barraclough?"

"Oh, Mr. Barraclough, how *do* you do?"

"Mrs. Harper, how do you do? Miss Dorrington, it would not be true if I said it was an unexpected pleasure to see you."

"Which would not be true—the pleasure or the unexpected?"

"I am not to be taken off my guard like that. Has your charge—" this to Mrs. Harper— "heard so few flattering speeches lately that she is prepared to listen to one from me?"

"Possibly she is ambitious, and desires to go down to history as *le vainqueur du vainqueur de la terre*."

"In that case," turning round to the girl, "I am only too willing to be conquered. I will begin at once to swell the chorus of *morituri te salutant*."

Miss Dorrington tossed her head with very pretty scorn.

"Oh, you are too clever and too classical for me. The Aide-de-camp is much more understandable."

"Clever and classical," repeated the lawyer. "And I had thought it was a contradiction in terms, and that to be clever you had to be anti-classical in these days."

"What was the Governor saying to you just now? I know you won't tell me, but I was determined to ask you, all the same."

For answer he gave a glance round him.

"You have been most basely deserted. Mrs. Harper has responded to a call from some enemy of yours in ambush, and has left you alone with me."

"How sweet—I mean how aggravating of her! There are some chairs over there under that tree."

"Now," she exclaimed, "I mean to stay here for, at least, ten minutes. They're not going to move me on again. They've been moving me on all day. I seem to have been walking for hours. Don't you think," with a quick look at him, "it's very pleasant here?"

"Very pleasant," he answered, leaning forward and idly flicking the grass with his disengaged glove, "very pleasant indeed."

"We saw Mr. O'Brien a few minutes ago. He said he wanted to speak to you, so I suppose he may come along at any moment."

"Let us hope for the best."

"What is that?" queried the lady.

"That he won't find me."

"Thank you—that is, if any compliment is intended. You see, you are so elliptical and so oracular, that one never knows how to take you. People never know when to believe you, except when you are speaking in Court, and then you have a way of making the Judge and jury and everyone else believe you. At least, that's what I've heard them say. Don't you think it's very strange? Just when you could afford to be natural, people don't think you are; and just when they know you must be acting a part, they can't help being carried away by you."

He was looking across at the pavilion and at

the intervening lawn dotted with moving figures. His lips parted slightly as if about to speak, and then closed firmly as if he had registered a mental vow that he would not let himself be tempted.

"Well?" she queried.

"Well," he replied, "I was thinking that if Mr. O'Brien doesn't find me presently, your Aide-de-camp will soon be here after you. There he is now, by the pavilion."

"With the usual crowd of adoring spinsters round him. He looks as though he was having a good time."

His next words rather astonished her.

"You know that at a word from you he would leave them all lamenting."

"Oh!" The directness of the attack sent a swift wave of colour over her face. "I know no such thing. He has never told me anything of the kind. I don't know how you can say it."

"If you ask me my candid opinion," went on Barraclough quietly, "I really think he is better than the rest of them."

This was not contradicted.

"Sets off his uniform well—but that's what they are chosen for. Made a hundred for his University against Cambridge—in these days of croquet and ping-pong, that's distinctly in his favour."

She smiled and turned to the speaker with bright eyes and animated face. She was distinctly pretty. He looked at her, and then looked away.

"Of course," she said, "he is not like you."

He again leaned forward, his chin resting on his hand, and his hand supported by an elbow on his knee. His next words were a long time coming.

"No," he said slowly, "he is not like me. And it is quite possible that there may be no marked resemblance even when——"

"When what?"

"When he is wise enough and old enough to talk to you about things and people—about yourself, for instance—without any personal feeling in the matter—as I am talking now."

The reference to personal feeling or rather to the absence of it, might have been a trifle forced. Did it—she would not admit that the question floated across her mind—did it imply what it ostensibly denied?

"He is not clever like you."

"Who told you that I was clever?"

"I am not sure that I like him."

"No? And yet the ensign fluttered very prettily in your cheeks a minute ago."

"Oh, you are exasperating."

"Quite the contrary. Here comes O'Brien. What on earth can he have to say to me?"

"I will leave you and go and find Mrs. Harper."

She tripped across the lawn, a dainty figure in a dainty setting. He sat and watched her go.

She was lost in the kaleidoscope of colours. But he still remained where he was, and idly flicked the

grass as before, with his disengaged glove. People said he was fond of the girl. But, if so, he never told her. If he was conscious of the rising of a tide that had been sternly suppressed for fifteen years, no one ever knew of the fact.

But O'Brien's intentions were interrupted. He had just caught sight of the man he wanted, when a Government House messenger, who had been industriously searching the grounds, came forward and put a telegram into his hand. The contents of that message caused astonishment—so much astonishment that the benevolent impulse to ask Barracrough to do Ward a good turn, which had been in his mind all the afternoon, was driven out and forgotten.

In Venice the following evening (while Barracrough was on his way back to Sydney—he astonished everyone by suddenly leaving Melbourne), Miss Rayment received a cable from O'Brien that had been forwarded on to her from London:—"Le Mercier died Sydney Hospital to-day."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CLIFF.

O be above the cliffs that lead round to the South Head Lighthouse ; to be above the cliffs and above the houses, caught up into the air that, strong as wine, is carried hither across illimitable miles of ocean—that is, literally and metaphorically, to be above the world. There are few more reviving places on earth than this undulating, intermittently grass-grown, intermittently rocky plateau, which is the first part of Australia to greet the sun as he rises from the eastern sea. If the dweller in the city feels tired, and sick, and sorry, as he may do ; if he feels that he is physically depressed, or mentally and spiritually dead ; if he feels the need of some reminder that life is larger than the room within which he lives, and that Nature has more to offer than the walls and plaster which shut him in ; if he feels all this, or any part of it, he cannot do better than climb the rising ground outside the environments of Sydney, and, with the salt spray on his face, look out towards the sea.

One afternoon, in the still early spring, two figures ascended the path leading up from the Watson's Bay jetty, and made their way along the high ground that terminates abruptly at the South Head Light. They were two figures which much resembled many another two that have trod the same path and looked out on the same ocean in years past, and will continue to look out on it for centuries to come. Figures of a man and a woman—both young as years go, though one, at any rate, was fairly old in thought and experience.

The girl's dress fluttered in the mild sea breeze. There were dissolving white caps on the water, and a wide area of sunlight falling into shadow further out towards the horizon. A couple of steamers were in sight along the coast, and further seawards was a broad white sail. The sky was clear and the sun was shining; a warm, grateful sun, not yet powerful enough to cause distress, but sufficiently in evidence to secure a welcome for the tempering breeze.

A passer-by, if he had taken the trouble to look in the man's face, would have said that he seemed to be in need of a rest and change. A face that was more than a little drawn and sunken, though the walk up the hill and the sea air had brought a touch of needed colour into it. The less than robust appearance might have been due to dissipation or self-indulgence, though the eyes rather contradicted the latter supposition. It was a face that did not look ignoble, and had an expression that might not have

been out of place on the countenance of a nature-worshipper.

And yet this was the man who declared that he had put ideals far from him ; the man who had fallen on the floor on the upstairs room at Mandano's.

He had evidently found a companion ; and the casual passer-by, judging by appearances, would have said that he had been fortunate in the find. During the past few weeks there were many people in the city who had come to know this girl, and not a few who had regarded her with frank and meaning looks of admiration. The tragedy of a month or two back had brought her name to everybody's lips. She was a guest, or a confidential friend, or something between the two at the house where a sad and sensational event had occurred. Her name had been coupled with that of the victim in a grim and terrible affair. It was discovered that he had been speaking to her on the day of the race. Rumour hinted at the possibility, even the probability of some connection between the presence of this girl in the house and the form that had been found lifeless on the grass.

The echo of these rumours reached Edith Grey ; and being more shy and sensitive than the majority of women, she felt an intense longing to escape from associations that carried with them the recollection of trouble and unmerited shame. It was the tongues of the women that she dreaded most. The slight

turn of the shoulder, the slight lifting of the eyebrows, were refinements of feminine cruelty to which she was now introduced. The Rayments had decided to give up their house, and to visit Europe. It was, therefore, necessary for Edith to do something for herself. She could not, or would not, remain idly at home, where the struggle for existence, with a limited income and an unlimited family, was already sufficiently severe. Casting round for some opening, she took the place that offered at Mandano's.

It was inevitable that Ward should have felt and expressed some astonishment at finding the girl there. It seemed a far cry from the quiet of the drawing-room at the house of the Minister for Education and Labour to the glittering saloon in the city, where men burned incense to Bacchus day and night, and where women flitted to and fro for the purpose of tending that unquenchable flame. There was a world of difference between the two atmospheres; between the soft lights and luxury of the Rayment house by the harbour, and the din and pleasure-seeking and mechanical mirth of this popular and public meeting-place. What strange circumstance had brought the guest of Rayment, the chosen companion of Rayment's proud daughter, to the necessity of working for her living amid such an environment? Ward was not only astonished, but—such is the unconscious Philistinism of all of us—a trifle shocked; insensibly his mental attitude towards the girl underwent, if not a change, at least a

modification. A man may be as Bohemian as he pleases, but as a rule his most deferential and respectful sentiment is kept for women who do not, whether from choice or necessity, cultivate Bohemian surroundings.

And yet, what should she have done? Fortune plays strange tricks with women who have been brought up in a state of economic dependence ; and when the plank on which they have walked a certain distance gives way under them, there must necessarily be some danger of a fall. Those are happy who can then cling to a helping hand, or step at once into some haven of refuge. Perhaps they are happier still who are strong enough and gifted enough to work out their own destiny, and who, in the pursuit of some calling that brings artistic pleasure and satisfaction, reap their own sufficient reward. But most deserving of sympathy and assistance, and most usually without either, are the women who are suddenly called upon to take their place amid the rank and file of industry ; who fight, as it were, in midstream ; and who have barely time to recover from the shock of altered circumstances before the voices of the storm are crying in their ears. It is just possible that in some cases the loss and danger to the individual may be the gain to humanity at large. Rather fortunately for those of us who are not Orientalists, and whom Brett will not recognise, there are occasional refining influences to be met with along the harder commercial and residential walks

of life. Continually we find the waste places, even the vicious-looking places of earth, being brightened by deft fingers, and rounded cheeks and shining eyes.

For when all is said that can be said on the subject it is the women like Edith Grey, circumstanced like Edith Grey, who make the world. They ask little from the world, and in the majority of cases they get less. They are broken on all our altars; they are swept by the million into the gutter and into the street. They are the women who work. The society butterflies may end in idleness, as they have begun, but these other women work on for ever. They are the women who suffer. They do the best they can, the best that is in their hearts and consciences to do, but when they ask for bread they are as often as not given a stone. The others may play at love and talk of marriage settlements, but the emotionalism of these women is of a different stamp. When they love, it is not as men do, with a fitful, feverish, restless feeling that is here to-day and there to-morrow; they love through good report and evil, through honour and dishonour, through an endless round of petty duties, through circumstances calling for infinite pity, through the gates of suffering, right up to the citadel of shame. It is because they are what they are that the earth is not the cold, calculating, uninteresting, and material place it otherwise would be. They are not the picture women, not the helpless women, not, thank Heaven,

the pedantic and the spectacled women, but they are the women who make the world.

Something of this knowledge—the knowledge that humanity as a whole, and himself as an individual, had more to hope from the women who worked hard and felt deeply, than from the women who played with passion and murdered time—gradually grew upon Arthur Ward, and made him rather ashamed of his former supercilious feeling. In the course of a few weeks or less, a bond of friendship grew up between Edith Grey and himself. If there was no warmth of feeling on his side, there was at least growing respect and something like gratitude. He could see that she preserved a womanly charm, and even some shy reserve, amid an atmosphere of reckless unconcern or worse. Men prominent in public life, men high in the commercial world, middle-aged men as well as young men, spoke favourably after their fashion of this new acquisition of Mandano's, and paid her compliments to her face. But Ward could not help noticing that she would turn from them, even the richest and most flattered among them, if he entered, and that the attention and sympathy she gave to him were given to no one else. People began, half jokingly, but more in earnest, to speak to him about his "conquest"; and though he disliked the word, and knew that the implied insinuation was a calumny on her, he could not but feel some faint stirring of complacency and gratified pride.

This afternoon they had gone out together, and coming to a place where the ground began to slope towards the edge of the cliff, he threw himself down on the grass, allowing the breeze to play on his face. She took a seat beside him.

"If there were only a deserted garden somewhere about," he said, "the picture would be complete."

He was evidently following a train of thought in which she had no part, and repeated, more to himself than to her, the lines:—

"All are at one now, roses and lovers,
Not known of the woods, or the streams, or the sea,
Not a breath of the time that has been hovers
In the air now soft with a summer to be.
Not a breath shall there sweeten the seasons hereafter
Of the flowers or the lovers that laugh now or weep,
When, as they that are free both of weeping and laughter,
We shall sleep."

"Do you know," he said, "those verses seem to me to clear the air? They are the most crystalline, musical, sea-like things I know."

She murmured an assent.

"Of course they don't amount to much when you merely hear them said. It's no use hearing them once, or even reading them once; you want to know them. The man who is always repeating poetry to other people is an unmitigated nuisance and a curse. Heaven forgive me for my own sins in that direction. But even now I believe there is no wine on earth like this kind of wine, when it is the

real article and not the sham ; when the lines will ring in your ear when you want them to ring. Yes, I believe that even now."

"Why do you say even now? You are not old."

"Perhaps not, but a man who is not thirty may be as old as Methuselah in everything but years."

She wanted to tell him that he had great possibilities yet ; that he was gifted with certain knowledge and certain powers ; that it was unmanly and unjust to himself to give way, and not make the best of all he had. But she hardly knew how to say this, so she said nothing.

His next words were in a different key.

"I feel better to-day than I have done for a long while. A few weeks ago I felt ten times as old as the hills, and not a tenth part as interesting, even to myself. Things were about as bad as they could be. I was absolutely at bedrock."

"I am very sorry," she told him—and she looked it. Her eyes were eloquent.

"I won't speak of it again. It is over and done with. You see, I met you, and we are here now."

"I should thank you for taking me out. I love being here ; it is so different."

"How different?"

"Different from town—and from Mandano's. Oh, different from everything. It's not like anything else."

"And how about me? Am I different too?"

"Yes," she answered simply, "you are."

"If it isn't an egotistical thing to ask, how do I seem to you to be differentiated from other people?"

"I don't know—at least, I do know. I think I know. But you are not like the others at all."

This girl, despite some of the associations that were part of her life, seemed as innocent of shams as Nature itself. And yet, he asked himself, was there not such a thing as a mirage—the most deceptive of all shams and peculiarly Nature's own?

"Ah, well, it was a foolish question. If you had answered it truthfully—and you wouldn't have answered it otherwise—I might have experienced a shock."

"No, no," she exclaimed; "oh, no."

"It's pleasant sometimes to eat the lotus, to go to sleep, and yet to know that you are asleep."

"If I were you— —" she began again and hesitated.

"If you were I?"

"If I were you," said the girl, looking away from him towards the sea, "I would not fret over things and let them worry me so, but I would be thankful for all that I could do. I would be glad because I was a man, and because people would listen to me, and I could give them pleasure sometimes."

"If a man always had an Egeria like you beside him, he might always be strong and hopeful too."

She did not understand the reference, but her eyes smiled, still looking out towards the sea.

"Egeria was a lady who gave a man good advice a long while ago."

“Did she?”

“The modern Egeria is not always like you, Miss Edith. Sometimes, once in a million times, she is young, beautiful, charming; as a rule she wears glasses and has short hair.”

“You are laughing at me,” said the girl, “but I did mean what I said. It would make me happy to think that you had done justice to yourself—and that people knew you and were proud of you.”

“Laughing at you—I laughing at you? I would as soon think of laughing at the sea out there, or at the kindly sky.”

There was just a touch of increasing coolness in the air. The occasional figures dotted about the cliff were making their way back to the jetty.

“We have had a good walk,” he said, “and it’s getting rather cold. We can catch a boat,” looking at his watch, “in twenty-five minutes from now.”

He rose and buttoned his coat more closely round him. They walked away together, neither saying anything, but she with a look in which contentment remained. She gathered from a glance at his face that his thoughts were not troubled ones, as they evidently had been a couple of hours ago.

The path began to descend more abruptly. When it had once crept out from the shadows thrown by the northern shore, they could see the ferry-boat making its way across. It looked like a cockle-shell in the distance, but it was coming nearer. He stopped suddenly, and turning round to her, said,

"We shall be among the crowd in a few minutes. I want to say to you what I can't say when we are down there. I want us to be friends—real friends. Do you think we can?"

She met his gaze with transparent frankness.

"I thought we were friends."

He gave a swift glance round to see what progress the boat was making.

"I want to be fair to you. I want you to know what sort of a man I am, so that you can be something to me, or let me go my way, just as you please; I am deeply, sincerely grateful to you for coming out with me like this. Yours is the kind of influence I want. You have helped me already; will you help me still more?"

She could only wonder what he meant.

"I want to see you as often as I can—as often as you care to see me. I know I'm selfish, desperately selfish, but I want you to save me from myself. I don't want you to leave me alone. I've been an awful fool, and worse than a fool. I've lost some of my nerve, some of my self-control, during these past two or three months; but I'm getting it back. I honestly believe it is coming back. But as I said, I am not myself yet, and I don't want to be left too much alone."

"I would like to do anything for you that a friend could do."

"Ah, yes. That's it—that a friend could do! You are a woman—a pretty woman, and lots of men

will talk friendship to you ; but, believe me, that isn't what they mean. I don't profess to know how a woman feels about these things. But I am trying to be candid. I don't ask you to be my friend ; for the thing that is called friendship is only a mask for indifference, nothing else. If there is any warmth or life or colour in it, it means more than friendship. And it isn't friendship—not that cold, wintry, indifferent thing called friendship—that can do me much good just now.”

“ But you want me to be your friend—you do, don't you ? What else could I ever be to you ? ”

He stopped suddenly, and from looking intently into her eyes, looked away.

“ Marvellous ! ” he exclaimed. “ You have put the philosophy of the whole world into a sentence—into that one question. If a man doesn't want a girl to be his friend—and marriage is impossible for one or the other of them—what is it that he wants the girl to be ? And the world kicks moderately hard at the man, and ten times harder at the woman, who try to answer the question in their own way.”

“ I would like to do anything I could,” she said, still puzzled, “ if you could only tell me what it is.”

“ Nothing, dear girl,” he answered her, “ only try and think as well of me as you can. There is the boat coming alongside now. We shall just have time to catch it if we make haste.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

DELIRIUM.



A GREAT thing had happened. It seemed to Arthur Ward that never in his life had anything so great happened or any prospect quite so dazzling opened before the eyes of mortal man.

He drank of a cup that was more sweet and delirious and intoxicating than the cup which the Bacchantes lifted up to shouts of "Evoe" in the golden age. True, it would have seemed to many a small and pitiful and plentifully watered draught. But he was unaccustomed to it, and it ran through his veins like magic and kindled in his senses like fire.

The medium through which this potent influence was conveyed was no other than the sheet which issued from the *Recorder* Office.

The paper which he had held in his hand, and which he had let drop on the floor beside him, contained references to himself, and a brief, much summarised report of the speech he had made on

the previous evening. There were several other speakers, and as a rule they were much better known than he was. But he had been specially singled out. The paper had gone out of its way to declare that his was the speech of the evening. Moreover, it had hinted, not obscurely, that the advanced democratic party had secured a welcome and powerful addition to its ranks—an addition that was likely to make its presence felt at the coming elections.

Reason declared in plain and emphatic terms that what seemed to him great was in reality very little. It was merely tentative praise that might be recalled or turned to censure in a day. Yet it contained a promise. It might lead to the realisation of a great deal. It brought appreciably nearer some of the things that were worth striving for. And what were they, these things worth striving for? The chances of some emergence from under the black pall of a life's brief obscurity, the realisation of a time when a voice—his own voice—would be heard in the councils of a nation, when the audience long looked for would be found; when the deep desire, strong as physical thirst, for just one opportunity to get out of the ranks of the millions, who ran like sheep after blind leaders, would be attained. What a dream it had been. It had come to him not only in sleep, but when he was wide awake, and had shouted to him in a clarion voice, telling him to get up and do some-

thing, and believe in life and in himself. And then, for a long time—a time that might have been only months, but that might have been years—he had been blankly staring at a blank wall.

Some time before, he had made an attempt to reach his audience through the medium of a book. Looking back upon it now, he believed that book was not wholly a bad one, though written more than three years ago. It was not great nor epoch-making. But neither was it absolutely crude and juvenile. It was the highest expression he could give to the highest truths of which he had as yet knowledge. But he had given it forcible, in places dramatic form. He honestly did not think that anyone could call the book dull. And yet it had fallen as flat and unread as a religious tract among a crowd of bookmakers at a Flemington Meeting.

Books were useless. He was not the fashion, and no one would read him. He must speak to the people directly if he were to speak at all. He must get a voice in public affairs, or be forever silent. The latter course had seemed the only alternative. But the events of the last couple of days had wrought a change. The vision had actually reappeared before him, a trifle more real, a trifle more resplendent than of old.

Like a man drugged, he sat motionless with the paper on the floor beside him. He deliberately gave himself up to the pleasure of the new emotion. He knew it would not last. But he

still sat motionless, happier than he had been for years, letting the invisible sunlight of awakened anticipation flood over him, knowing and yet not caring that it would presently vanish and fade into the light of common day.

* * * * *

Seen from the balcony of the hotel, the line of dusky red on the horizon was fading rapidly into dark. It was finely situated, this house of Mandano's. On an evening such as this it was worth a great deal to be able to come out and feel the cool, caressing breeze that swept up from the ocean; to see the lights beginning to dance in the harbour and flicker throughout the city—the city and harbour that one must learn to love, that one could not help loving, if one had any sense at all of the beauty and the fairness that are on the face of the earth.

“You must have been pleased,” she was saying.

“I admit I was.”

“And yet it did not last?”

“No. And I never expected that it would.”

“You are not low-spirited again?”

“Not that, either. But neither am I in the frame of mind I was in yesterday. Things are getting back to their old level. Lucky if the last state isn't worse than the first.”

“You don't think that you will? You don't mean——”

"No, I don't really mean it. You see there are other things—and other people—to think about, and some of them count for a good deal."

It was evident that she had a great belief in him. Since his experience of Miss Rayment he believed less in women than he had done a few years back. But in this case no man with eyes and a mind could feel much doubt. Even the callow sensualists who came to the hotel believed in her. Undoubtedly it was a privilege to be talking to her here.

"At any rate," he said after a pause, "I don't think I shall let myself become again the wreck I was only three weeks ago."

The girl was leaning one arm on the railing and was looking outwards. There were more impressive types of beauty than hers, no doubt, but yet with her well-harmonised features, with the soft masses of dark hair piled round her brow and temples, with the melting curves of the lips—well, it was certainly a pleasure as well as a privilege to be talking to her.

Again the breath of night air came sighing upwards.

"You are tired of hearing me talk?"

It was a barefaced attempt on his part to get her to turn her face and say something. He was almost ashamed of it as soon as made.

"I like listening to you," she answered.

"I should prefer to be listening to you."

"I have nothing to say. There is so little in my life worth talking about."

"There is not much in mine."

"After yesterday? You can't think that after yesterday."

He drew his chair closer to hers, leaning his arm also on the railing.

"To tell you the truth, I am in much the same position as I was that day on the cliffs. I am better in health, stronger, not quite such a weak, miserable fool as I have been ; but even if things were going better with me in one way than they are now, that would not be all. It would not be enough. Yesterday morning for a few minutes, for an hour or so after I had read the paper, I was satisfied. I was quite ridiculously satisfied. And yet, though I knew it was ridiculous, I was glad that I was satisfied—glad that a thing like that had the power to satisfy me. Does this interest you?"

She looked as if it did.

The cold logic of the situation came back soon enough. It came back that very afternoon. It was another case of the guardian angel gone, and the demon returned to take possession. It was not quite the same demon, he was a little more genial and a little less awful, but he was a demon all the same.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, and her voice conveyed a world of sympathy, "you are not quite yourself yet. I thought all that trouble had gone."

He did not wish to presume on her friendship, or to bring any element of difficulty or embarrassment

into their relations, but it was tempting, too tempting to take the hand that was resting on the balcony near his own. She drew it away.

"No, no—not like that," she said.

With a sudden movement that rather startled her, he pushed his chair further away from hers, and folding his arms, looked out grimly at the sky-line.

"Not like that," he repeated, with a note of bitterness in which something of the old hopelessness blended; "so be it then. Plenty of moonlight and starlight, but never 'glad, confident morning' between us. Plenty of kind phrases and sympathy, and the rest of it, but nothing that isn't quite ordinary and proper and conventional, nothing warm or worth having. I understand, it is to be not like that."

When she spoke again there were tears in her voice.

"What can I ever be to you more than I am now?"

It was the old question in another form—the question asked him on the cliffs. And again it brought him to a sudden standstill. It seemed to strike a warning bell somewhere in his inner consciousness. Where was he driving? On to what rock was he driving himself and her? She had a right to ask that question. What could she ever be to him? Marry her? Did he want to marry her? Or would she marry him if he did? Perhaps—probably. She was good enough for him—far too good for him—good enough as far as that went for

any man living. But the whole scheme and business of marriage were outside his life. He had nothing and less than nothing to offer anyone, even if he wanted to offer it. Marriage might be well enough perhaps for men differently situated ; well enough for men who had an established position, and knew what was before them ; well enough it might be for men who were satisfied with life and the obvious every-day things of life ; well enough for those who could risk the disillusionment that so often comes—but not for him.

What then ? It was a queer, malevolent trick of fortune, but one must learn to laugh at the irony of it, and make the best choice that the victim could.

He was still looking leagues away from her, but there was no longer bitterness in his voice. In its place there was a note of decision mingled with some sense of loss and personal humiliation.

“Forgive me ! You are absolutely right and I was wrong. I am a worse brute than I thought I was. You have given me so much, and still I was not satisfied.”

There was no doubt about it, she was in tears.

“Edith,” he said, “if I have made you sad I will never forgive myself to my dying day. I am going now. Believe me, that if I have offended you unthinkingly, there is no one living who is so anxious to please you as I am.”

She turned her head as he rose to go.

“I shall see you again ? ”

"Yes, if I can believe that you would really like to see me, you shall see me again."

It was a full fortnight before he dared see her again. For the first two or three days the time hung upon his hands like lead. He had much to do, but could not fix his mind upon it. The wish to meet her was stronger than he had believed, after the disenchantment with regard to the other woman, such a wish could ever again be. But gradually the desire to work, and the capacity for work came back.

It was necessary in the first place to earn a living. That was an elementary fact from which there could be no escape. Perhaps it was well after all that it presented itself just now. It gave him something to occupy his time. Thank Heaven, the worst of the physical and mental depression—illness it must have been—had passed away.

He had to earn his living, and just at present it was a precarious one. For nearly three months he had not given a lesson or written a line. Most of his old pupils had left him and gone elsewhere. But now that he was himself again, and had time and inclination to seek them out, he found that some at any rate were willing to come back. With the remnant of a once large matriculation class, he set to work again.

His ambition, however, lay along another path. The public arena was the one to which his thoughts were constantly turning. To win any semblance of

success in it, it was necessary in the first place to make one's self known. He resolutely set about the task. The columns of the *Sydney Labour Journal* were open to him, and he wrote for it industriously. It was a small, unpretentious sheet, with few literary airs and graces, but it had a fairly wide circulation among the working classes. It had a trenchant style of criticism, in some respects its own. But trenchant though it could be, it played the game fairly. It was not brutal or prurient. No one need have felt ashamed to see it on his breakfast table. And to say that, is to say rather more than can be said of half the newspapers of its class.

Ward's contributions appeared regularly under a *nom de plume* that came to be recognised and looked for. In Labour circles the real name of the author was soon canvassed abroad. He made some slight addition to his modest earnings by work of this kind, but what was of more importance—he gained a reputation among the class he wished to reach.

To do him justice, it was not a reputation built on shams. He believed thoroughly and intensely in what he wrote for the Labour paper. At this period of his life he was convinced that the people who had anything, whether it was money, position, or influence, were in nine cases out of ten the people who deserved least, and who had done least for the world. All his sympathies were with the people who had nothing. He had nothing himself. He was as poor

as any of them. He had gone through more than most of them. He had the same desires as the struggling people had. The fact that his upbringing had been different did not affect the question. He wanted to help them, and the only selfish consideration he allowed himself was a hope that those he strove to help would some day help him.

His efforts were not without result. He found he was becoming known. He was constantly being asked to speak at meetings of the Progressive party in various places. He was careful never to refuse, if by any possibility he could comply. The nearest approach to elation he had felt since reading the *Recorder* article was when he received a telegram from the local secretary of the Progressive League, asking him to second an important resolution at a public meeting in a town one hundred miles away. As his financial resources were down to a few shillings, and the railway and hotel fare would have taken more than the ready cash he possessed, he thought it wiser in that instance to refuse. He telegraphed his regrets and his appreciation of the objects in view.

He put his pride in his pocket, and called at the *Recorder* office. After all, the paper had done him a kindness. He had no grudge to pay off. Journalistic etiquette was not a thing for him to fret about. He had not invented it, and there was not much doubt that it would go on very well without him. As it happened, the editorial

reception was frank and almost cordial. The clear-eyed, hard-faced man seemed almost to have forgotten the disagreements of a few months before. Possibly, having had much else to think about, he had quite forgotten it. At any rate he lent a favourable ear to the request that the former contributor might be allowed to resume the work he had abandoned.

"I will see about it, Mr. Ward," he said. "If it can be arranged, we will let you know." He added, as the visitor was going out, "I hear you have been speaking in public lately. Quite right! I think you are doing the right thing. Good afternoon!"

The caller did not allow himself to anticipate that much would follow from the interview. A conditional promise bound no one, and a much-sought-after editor rather less than other people. Yet, to his surprise and pleasure, he received a note only two days later to say that his weekly contribution would be welcome on the usual terms, and that it was hoped he would begin forthwith. With this notification in his pocket, he felt if the worst came to the worst he had at least a reasonable certainty of avoiding that once-threatened derelict refuge—the Sydney Domain, Australia's Hyde Park.

It was about this time he remembered that he had not spoken to Edith Grey for a fortnight, except now and again to pass a formal word in the presence of others. Yet the thought of her had never been far from his consciousness. A chance meeting with O'Brien—O'Brien, of all the people in the world—

happened to bring the girl suddenly and vividly back. Emerging from Mandano's, with his usual well-fed, well-satisfied air and glossy appearance, O'Brien encountered Ward in the street. After some more than usually civil remarks with reference to the latter prospects, and the state of public affairs generally, O'Brien made an allusion to the "girl in there"—indicating the hotel he had just left. She wasn't a bad-looking one, by George—though he had seen women with prettier faces—but somehow he liked her style. Intended to get her to come out for a drive with him next Sunday.

"Queer thing," added Geoffrey, "that it should be the one staying at the Mountains at Christmas-time. Don't fancy she thought of going behind the bar in those days. But you never know. Dash't good voice too. I've been telling her she ought to go on the stage ; she's wasting her time there. First chance I get I'll bring Williamson's man along to hear her. Ta-ta."

Thinking of her after O'Brien had gone, Ward was convinced that he must have another word with her. He would not abandon her to men of the O'Brien stamp. And on the heels of that conviction there came a stronger, more subtle, more insidious thought. It took the form of some dusky and tempting angel or demon, and whispered that if she were going to fall into anyone's arms, it might as well be into his. And if not that—for he repelled the thought as soon as it came to him—it might yet be

possible to find some way of escape—some solace for both her and him.

Immediately after dinner he went out. He called at the house, and learning from the porter that Miss Grey was on the balcony, he said he had a message to give her in person. Without standing on further ceremony, he ran upstairs.

Arrived on the balcony, he found she was not there. His first impulse had been resultless. Well, perhaps it was for the best. What an idiot he might have made of himself. Perhaps she had seen him coming up the stairs, and was keeping out of sight. Serve him right if she was. And yet——

He sank down on a chair, staring in front of him in rather gloomy meditation. He was there for perhaps ten minutes, when he got up slowly and turned to go away. And as he rose she came through the folding doors of her room, which opened on the balcony some distance further round. He had given up the hope of meeting her, and it seemed as she came that the darkened sky grew brighter, and a tide that had been sternly suppressed flowed strongly back.

“You are surprised to see me,” he said. “I am not much of a Spartan after all. I didn’t stay away very long.”

Unless he was deluding himself with a ridiculous belief in the semblance of things, she was in manner and look more pleased than he had yet seen her.

"Hush!" She gave a warning look over his shoulder. "They will be coming up from dinner presently. They mustn't see me talking to you here."

She was right. He ought to have thought of that himself. While she hesitated he led her along the balcony as far as the doors, through which she had emerged. They stood half open. Rather recklessly, hardly thinking what he was doing, and only anxious to escape intrusion, he drew her inside. It was her own room, small but pretty, with white curtains outlined in the deepening shadow.

"Now," he said, letting go her hand and standing a little away from her, "may I talk to you here—just for five minutes? Or if you think it better not, I will go at once."

The shy, sensitive girl first met with at the Mountain Hotel had developed wonderfully in the past few months. Recent experiences—the men she had met, the men who had talked to her, and admired her, and whose admiration, while not spoiling her, had taught her her own value—had added something to her grace of bearing, and even to her physical charm. Sensitive she was still, but most of the shyness had vanished. She stood up confidently before the man who had daringly followed her here, her eyes glistening through the growing dark.

"Oh, no, no, no. Talk to me. I've been wanting to see you for a long time."

"Two hours ago I never dreamed I should be here. But I met Mr. O'Brien this afternoon—heard him mention your name. And I thought and wondered, thought a lot of things and wondered a lot of things. The old wish to see you came back—though for that matter I don't know that it ever went away."

She had no answer ready, and he came a step nearer.

"You must know that you are more to me than the others. Tell me that you think of me as I do of you. Let me believe that you do."

The warm feel of her breath on his face was working on his senses like a subtle spell, but it seemed that she was not happy—even now.

"What is it? What is it that is making you sad?" he asked with an earnest solicitude.

"Nothing—it's nothing at all."

"But there *is* something. Why don't you say? There are tears in your eyes! I can see them."

"It is the life—that is all. But I won't think of it. Only sometimes I can't help it."

"You don't like being at Mandano's."

"I hate it. I would give anything to be able to go away."

She looked at him, and the upturned face seemed to lose its shadow of trouble.

"You must hate it. And I am very much as you are. I hate the life I am leading, because there is no one in it but myself. With you it would be

different. You are a great deal to me. I have nothing to offer you, and the world would say that I had no right to talk to you here like this, but the fact that follows me up and down the street is that you are more than all the others to me."

Her reply was too low for him to hear, but the tide of emotion was making him reckless. It was not easy to stand in her room like this, and yet be altogether wise or sane.

"Since I have known you I have drunk hemlock. And there is no antidote away from you. You hate your life, and I am sick of mine. I have been seeking the bubble reputation, but love is the only thing in the world worth having. And if you love me, I will love you always."

"I do love you," she said, and her voice trembled.

"What would you have me do to prove it, then? Do you want me to go out of your sight for ever?"

What was said afterwards he could not recall, for words were inarticulate. But she had extricated herself from his arms, and was lying face downwards on the couch. Her breast was shaken with sobs, but when he took one step towards her, she made no sign. She loved him—she had said so—and that love implied self-surrender. He realised then, with a sudden, swift conviction, that he was looking at the eternal, living emblem of woman's potential sacrifice, and woman's after sorrow. And the realisation by a kind of miracle drove the seven devils out of him,

dammed up the flood-tide of passion, and left him with a shuddering, ebbing sense of shame.

He drew her hands from her face, kissed them quietly, and walked out on to the balcony and into the street.

CHAPTER XIX.

CHOOSING A CANDIDATE.

“RDER ! order !” yelled the occupant of the presidential chair.

In a struggle between the sense of his own dignity and a growing feeling of irritation, he had become purple in the face. The present occasion was one of the most momentous in his life. The audience before him was large and thoroughly representative. For the first time in local history the two forces had come together. There was the Labour force, and there was the kindred but differently constituted Progressive force. To belong to the former you had to be connected with one of the trades. To belong to the latter you had merely to subscribe to a platform.

The two organisations overlapped somewhat, and had sometimes found themselves tripping over each other in pursuit of the same aims. But the line of demarcation was clear. For one, the conditions of membership were manual ; for the other, they were

mental. The Labourites claimed that they did most of the hard work, and the Progressivists claimed that they supplied most of the brains. Neither claim could be said to be justified on the facts.

Not without much negotiation and preliminary sparring had the present meeting between the two bodies been arranged. The object was to choose a candidate for one of the Metropolitan seats at the coming elections a month hence. Every trade that could be called a trade, as well as various other democratic interests, was represented. The hall was full, and expectation ran high. The fact that the President of the Labour Council was one of the candidates, explained the presence of the Acting-President in the chair.

It was a gathering that was fully conscious of its strength. From that hall terms had been dictated to many Governments in the past. The delegates had now come together in confident mood. Most of them were quite at home on the hustings; all of them were used to the sound of their own voices in debate. Many spoke good, some indifferent, and some bad English. But they all spoke it as if they were not afraid of it, and as if they meant what they said. The fact that the two organisations were united, if but temporarily, made the sense of power all the greater.

There were many variations of type, and many shades of opinion represented in the hall. There was a fair proportion of firebrands—men who had

nothing to lose and everything to gain by pulling down what others had set up. There were others who had read a great deal. Some of them had read not wisely, but too well—they had filled themselves up with the philosophy of Godwin and Condorcet, of Rousseau and Voltaire. If the receiving vessel was deep enough, no harm was done; if it happened to be shallow, there was much spluttering and fuming and frothing over. There were many who laboured under a sense of class injustice. They had been born with it, and would die with it. The majority of these were pessimists of the darkest hue, but some were optimists, living always on the verge of an industrial millenium, and convinced whenever wages rose a shilling a week that existence was about to become a perfect and glorious thing. Many were Protectionists. Some were disciples of Henry George. The majority asserted a loud belief in the principles of "Australia for the Australians." Some carried the latter dogma to its extreme limit, and clamoured to be allowed to manage their own affairs, without the possibility of interference from Downing Street or anywhere else.

The bulk of opinion represented at this joint conference was not reflected in any one extreme phase. As a matter of fact the Labour Party in Australia, whatever may be the case with individual members of it, is, as a whole, well off, and—what is of more consequence—knows that it is well off. It has no desire to pull everything to pieces. If it

wants Socialism, it wants it by gradual stages. It is not quite certain that it wants it at all. In a measure it is Republican. But it has a lingering regard for the Constitution. It has not forgotten—the larger and more respectable portion of it has not forgotten—the country from which it sprang. At the same time, it desires many things and intends to have many things. It wants old age pensions. It wants factory legislation. It wants higher wages, and shorter hours. When it gets these it will be prepared to talk about Socialism. It has fully realised, much more fully than the English working man, what a tremendous influence its organisation gives it at the ballot-box. It exercises its vote only after careful consideration, and only after it has been convinced that the man who gets it will fight its cause and do what it requires.

“Order!” again called the Chairman in the strident voice that had done duty at indoor and outdoor meetings for a number of years. “I have an important hannouncement to make. The Honourable Mr. Johansen—” he paused until the cheering and occasional hooting that greeted the name had subsided—“the Honourable Mr. Johansen, leader of His Majesty’s Opposition, has been specially requested by the hexecutive to be present at our dee—libberashuns this evening. He has haccepted that hinvitation and will be with us halmost immediately.”

This announcement came as a surprise to at least half of those present. From the greater number of

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the audience it elicited applause, but others were silent, or threw out such inquiries as "What's that for?" "What game's this you're playing?" "What's he got to do with it, anyway?"

The Chairman, who had sat down, was again on his feet.

"The biggest hignoramus in this 'all," he shouted in a voice of loud expostulation, mingled with tremendous scorn, "must know, if 'e's capable of knowin' anything, that the combined forces of Labour and Progress can't give their support to the Bryant Government any longer. We're about full up of 'em. An' good reason we've got to be. We can't form a Government of our own—more's the pity—but we can 'ave a big say in what's goin' on. And the only man that's much good for us at the present time is Johansen."

The cheers were loud this time, and the dissentients few. The speaker smiled a gratified smile.

"The hexecutive has given this matter its most careful and hanxious con-sidderashun. Mr. Johansen may get 'ere at any moment. (Pause). I will call upon him—after the candidates have heach and severally expressed their views—I will call upon him to hadjudicate upon their merits and say which, in his opinion, is most deserving of support in this great contest—this battle of Tite-uns that is now approachin'."

The tumult broke out louder than ever. There were yells from all parts of the hall.

"What's he got to do with it?" and, "We came here to decide that ourselves!"

Again the strident voice obtained silence.

"Bless my soul, anyone would think this was a meetin' of the Rats' Push, hor—(pause)—hor a scramble of society swells for Government House champagne and chicken." (Laughter, and a voice, "When were you there, James?") "Isn't Johansen the honly man that's any good for us?" (Cries of "Yes" and "No"). "Isn't his opinion worth findin' out?" ("Yes"). "And isn't it a morrul and fizzikul certainty that the man he throws his weight in with will get in?" (Loud cries of "Yes," cheers, and a voice, "Good for you, James.")

"Well, then," continued the Chairman with a smile of mingled triumph and forgiveness, "what more do you want? We'll get his opinion—it's worth gettin'—no one else's is worth as much—but we needn't act upon it. That's the whole point and meanin' of the situation. There is no compulsion on any of us whatever. Some may think—and I confess I am one of 'em—that we would be wisest to go in with Johansen, but if the majority think hotherwise, we can take a ballot after hearin' what e' 'as to say. Does that meet with your happroval, gentlemen?"

The assent was this time unanimous.

The Chairman sat down, but almost immediately caught the eye of someone at the back of the hall and bobbed up again. "Gentlemen," he said impressively, "the Honourable Mr. Johansen has arrived."

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The man who had been waited for, and thus announced, entered the building. As he walked down the passage towards the platform, every seat was vacated while the occupants stood up and cheered. Even the minority who did not cheer, and who in their secret souls disliked and distrusted Johansen, thought it as well to stand up. For if ever a man looked a fit subject for an ovation, he did. The eyes and forehead and distinguished, thoughtful face, would have marked him out in any assemblage. He had the manners of a great man. He seemed as though he had all his life studied great parts. Some people said—it was the worst thing they could say about him—that he studied them in front of a mirror. Whether or not he was naturally great—what is more, three people out of four believed he was—he had learned the knack of greatness.

He advanced to the platform and took a seat on the chairman's right. Before doing so he bowed impressively to right and left, with just the requisite amount of dignity, and just that touch of deference that flatters the vanity of a democratic audience.

Arthur Ward was one of the four prospective candidates who occupied seats on the same platform, and who, from that position, were looking squarely in front of them at the audience that was to decide their fate. And just for a moment, as Johansen took his seat, Ward felt himself carried back nineteen centuries; he could hear the blare of

trumpets — he could hear the heralds proclaiming that Cæsar had arrived and that the gladiators could now draw swords.

It had been arranged that the candidates should speak in alphabetical order. The one who was to speak last was very glad of it. There was, at least, some advantage in being able to hear what had gone before and to have the final word. It was a slight enhancement of prospects that, in any case, could not be regarded as over bright.

It fell to McNeill to speak first. This was the man who had been referred to by Sharpe as an agitator, and a fellow to be kept out of the House at all costs. He was an Irishman and a voluble one. There was no doubt that he could talk. With more ballast and more training and more self-control he would have been an orator of the very first rank. As it was, he talked too much and too often. He never knew when to stop. And his creed outran the majority even of those who voted the Labour ticket. It was the creed of many landless Irishmen; it was the creed of the outlaw and the renegade. Wherever there was a Government or any political institution of standing, he had a burning desire to pull it down—a desire amounting to a passion. Had he lived in the old world his bitter hostility to the Conservative Government would have landed him in the stocks, if not gaol.

As he rose from his seat to set the ball in motion, and took one step towards the edge of the

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platform, there was a round of applause, followed by immediate silence. The audience had become the jury. McNeill was not now to talk to a mob-meeting in the open air. He was on his trial, and he knew it. He had come there determined to put a severe restraint on himself. He began with studied moderation, saying nothing about his own record, expressing in a couple of well-rounded sentences his gratification that united action in the popular interest had been decided upon, and trusting himself unreservedly to the judgment of the delegates and the people.

But he had not spoken for more than five minutes when it became tolerably plain to any critical listener that his chance was hopeless. Once launched into the middle of his subject, his Celtic blood boiled over. The excitement of the occasion went to his head. He roared and ranted, as he had roared and ranted in the park every Sunday afternoon for years past. He declaimed as if he were declaiming to his usual Sunday crowd of derelicts. He had denounced Monarchical government, personal property, the principles of individualism, and various other things, and was in the middle of a sonorous sentence, dealing with the evils of taxing the breakfast table of the poor man—the only practical question he had so far reached—when the Chairman's warning bell announced that his twenty minutes had expired, and he sat down.

The next utterance came from the Secretary of

the Progressive League, a man named Romans. His was a strange personality—in many respects interesting, in a few admirable, in others repellant. Physically he was not attractive. He was small and thin and parchment-visaged. Not more than five feet two or five feet three inches in height, his habitual stoop made him look even smaller than he was. His voice was harsh and unmusical. Many people said he realised as nearly as possible their idea of the regicide Marat. When told this, Romans smiled as though he regarded it rather as a compliment than otherwise. But that the man had brains was unquestionable. In his cold, hard, unscrupulous way he was regarded by all parties as a force to be reckoned with. Though not a worker with his hands, he was the silent influence behind most of the workers' movements that had agitated the country for the past ten years. His industry was untiring, and he had apparently solved the problem of living without rest or sleep. As Secretary of the Progressive League he was invaluable. The fact that the League had become a political power, the fact that it was in existence at all, was due almost entirely to him.

The one circumstance that told against him was that he made no friends. He had no emotional strength, no magnetism, no power of attaching anyone to himself by personal ties. It was known that he had no belief in anything, either in man or woman, God or Devil. With a different personality

—with considerably less brains and more humanity—he would have been a commanding figure in public life long before. As it was, his influence had always been that of the underground engineer. His efforts to rise above the surface had so far failed.

Yet it looked as if they might be successful this time. His speech was cleverly thought out and well suited to the audience. It was polished and satirical, as his speeches invariably were. It was clear enough and definite enough to satisfy the most exacting. As an exposition of a creed, the creed of nine-tenths of the people in the hall, it left nothing to be desired. True, it was a cold sort of utterance, unilluminated by anything but pure reason. And the man who delivered it was cold as an iceberg, and personally disliked. But would this coldness, this dislike, prevent him from getting the recognition which his abilities claimed? Would a general belief in the man's doctrines overcome dislike to the man himself? It might be so this time, though it had not been so before.

The third candidate was the President of the Labour Council, a man who belonged to the numerous family of Smith. His chances of becoming the nominee on this occasion were regarded as being on the whole better than those of any of the others. He was reckoned a good fellow, and had few, or no enemies. There was nothing remarkable about him. He would never excite

enthusiasm. But neither would he stir up strife, or create dissensions in the party to which he belonged. He was not ambitious enough to be really dangerous. Personally he was of middle age and of about medium height. He affected a rather better style and dress, and a more prosperous appearance than was common with the artisan class. On certain occasions he even went to church. He had occasionally been taken for a bank manager. Even in his working dress he looked hardly reckless enough, hardly dissatisfied enough with his surroundings, to satisfy democrats of the more violent type. But then the majority in the hall could scarcely be called violent. And the man's record proved that he could be trusted to go straight. The workers knew that, and in their estimation it meant a good deal.

It was rather a serious drawback that he had no special ability as a platform speaker. He only occupied fifteen minutes of the twenty allowed him, and never looked quite comfortable. With some hesitation he managed to get off his half dozen articles of belief, and to express his unswerving adherence to each and all of them. The most that could be said for it was that it was an honest statement without suspicion of frill or ornament. All at once, without the slightest attempt at rhetorical flourish, the speaker abruptly concluded. The audience knew he had finished simply because he sat down.

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"I will now," said the chairman, rising and glaring round him with the fierce glare that the militant democrat invariably gives the most friendly audience—the more friendly the audience the fiercer the glare—"I will call upon the fourth and last speaker, Mr. Arthur Ward, to hexpress his views."

Just for a moment, as he rose to his feet after the long hour's wait—just as the meeting threw off its character of a hundred mechanical figure-heads, and resolved itself into a couple of hundred burning eyes, all fixed upon himself—just for that moment the man now called upon felt the same curious surge at his heart that had threatened to disable him when he commenced his first debating-society speech at Cambridge ten years ago. But the round of applause that greeted him—applause carried beyond the mere formal limit as a mark of encouragement to a comparatively unknown man—enabled him to steady himself and to wait without overmuch anxiety for the sound of his own voice. He poured out a glass of water, sipped it, put the glass down on the table, and began.

In the course of a subsequent career, that was not uneventful, it fell to him to speak on many occasions, important and otherwise. Sometimes he knew he had spoken less than well. Sometimes the result was a popular success. But it always seemed to him, looking back in after years, that fortune had permitted him to reach that night the best he was capable of.

One fact had fixed itself on his brain while he sat listening to the other speakers. He must make this audience believe that he was in earnest. That was essential. It was the last audience in the world that was likely to be taken in by chaff. It had a practised eye for the quack and the charlatan and the parasite, and the ranter who ranted merely to catch votes. It knew the modes of these people off by heart. It liked a strong man, and was willing to follow a strong man. But the man who pretended to be strong, and discovered himself to be weak, was tolerably certain to be thrown out with emphasis, so far as it had any say in the process. At all hazards, and at all risks, this audience had to be convinced that the man who was going to speak to them was not trading on them for votes, and had not come there to mouth a platform in which he did not absolutely believe. But how was it to be done? To protest too much would be to defeat his own ends. A mere formal reiteration of principles was not enough. Running rapidly over the chances for and against him, he decided to leave the personal note to the last. He would end on that. Other things being almost, if not quite, equal, it would be on the skilful or unskilful manner in which that was struck that the issue would very largely depend.

For a little more than fifteen minutes he reviewed the five or six important questions that were before the country. Speaking generally, he believed that the only remedy for individual greed and class

monopoly was the wise extension of the powers of the State. He believed in factory legislation, in arbitration laws, in "bursting up" large estates, in taxing the land before taxing anything else. The louder the howl raised by the land-owners the better he would be pleased. As an ultimate goal he looked to free trade; but meanwhile he believed in safeguarding local industry by means of protective duties. When the industry was in competition with the labour of the foreigner and the coloured alien, he did not care how high those duties became. He believed in the absolute necessity of letting in the strongest searchlight of criticism upon existing administration; he believed that the blood and toil and money of the workers of the country had been used constantly in the past and were being used now to fatten parasites who were the most contemptible creatures on God's earth. If the price of liberty was eternal vigilance—as he and they knew it was—they could rely upon it that, whether in Parliament or out of it, no vigilance should be wanting on his part, in the interests of landless men and of poor men—of whom he himself was one—to bring about a state of affairs which, while it would not be the millenium, would at least be some distance nearer to abstract right.

"And, in conclusion," he added, kindling a little at the knowledge that not one of the members of the audience had averted his gaze while he had been speaking, "I have only to add one word of explanation—should I say of excuse—for my

presence on this platform to-night. I do not know whether my views are, or are not, in conformity with those of any party leader. I do not know, for example, how they appeal to the distinguished gentleman who is here at the invitation of your executive. Though I yield to no one in respect for his many admirable qualities, I am bound to say that I do not greatly care what effect any views of mine may produce upon him. So far as I am personally concerned, I am here because my lot is cast, now and always, with those who have suffered from social, moral, and political wrong—wrong which I do not pretend is altogether capable of remedy, but nevertheless can be remedied in many directions by agents that are now lying idle. Whether younger or older than those who have spoken before me—and two of them, at any rate, are men with whom I am in substantial agreement, and whose co-worker I am proud to be—I claim to have experienced and thought and suffered at least as much as any one of the three. I can only say again that, whatever your verdict may be, I shall be neither unduly elated nor unduly cast down. It seems to me that the only real satisfaction, the only lasting happiness in life is to be found in working for a cause to which you are pledged, for which you are prepared to make some sacrifices, and in which you thoroughly believe. That being so, I shall ask for nothing better, if health and strength remain to me, than to be

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allowed to continue, whether in Parliament or out of it, the work in your interests which I have had the honour of doing in the past."

There was a genuine ring in the cheers as the speaker sat down. For the moment he was satisfied. He had had his chance, and had said, however weakly and imperfectly, what he wished to say. The candidates were asked to retire while the ballot was being taken. Followed by curious eyes, they filed out of the hall.

Sharpe was looking at his watch.

"Reckoning an hour for counting the votes, they might be here in five minutes. The Secretary promised me that he would take a cab and drive round directly the result was known."

They were waiting the result in a private room of Mandano's. The man who had spoken last of the four candidates put down his empty glass.

"You didn't hear what was said?" he remarked interrogatively.

Sharpe shook his head.

"Fact that the meeting was *in camerá* wouldn't have stopped me—I would have worked in as a delegate. I've done it before, but I'm getting too well known. You say, Ward, you don't expect to pull it off?"

"No." He spoke quietly, and did not seem either excited or depressed. "I think it is a certainty for Smith. Not that I am dissatisfied. If thirty per

cent. vote for me it will be as much as I have any right to expect. I don't doubt, if I care to wait for it, that my time will come."

"You'll soon be out of your misery anyway."

"To tell you the honest, solemn truth, Sharpe, I don't very much care. I thought I would care a very great deal, but I find that I don't. You may not believe it, but as soon as we were outside I was thinking less about what the verdict would be than about 'something else.'"

"Queer," said Sharpe meditatively, "and yet I don't know. Seems to me that the political game is hardly worth the candle. There's more sand than laurel about it anyway, and the laurel, when you do get hold of it, is about as dusty as it can be."

"Excuse me for a minute—I'll be back presently."

A cab came driving up at a great pace. Someone stepped out and ran up the stairs. In two minutes Ward had got back. Whatever the result of his mission, he was looking surprised and rather scared.

"I am sorry to inform you"—the Secretary's look was regretful, and his tone conveyed both sympathy and respect—"that you were beaten by Smith in the final ballot by fifty votes to forty-four."

"Was I? It's as much as I expected, Sharpe"—catching the newspaper man's keen and inquiring glance. Then he murmured to himself after his fruitless search, "*She* is gone away; it's I who have driven her away, and I know I shall never see her again."

CHAPTER XX.

THE GOAL THAT RECEDES.



HERE were one or two unusual features about the contest to which the events of the last chapter were a preliminary. Johansen's part in it was somewhat mysterious. It was surmised from his presence at the meeting that he would support the candidate on whom the choice of the delegates fell. Yet he did less than what was expected of him. He would make no public utterance. He gave nothing better than moral support and not much of that. His conspicuous lack of enthusiasm caused his advocacy to do rather more harm than good. Another adverse factor in the case was the part played by the *Recorder* newspaper. After preserving a guarded, but on the whole a favourable, attitude for several days, it suddenly commenced to denounce Smith as being in the political sense a ludicrous absurdity, and ended by giving a whole-hearted support to his opponent.

Yet the Labour man won. It was only by a small margin, but he won. For the result he had two agencies to thank. In the first place the Labour phalanx rallied solidly round him, never showing its compact and determined organisation to better advantage. And in the second place he was indebted to the fighting support of the three men who had been rejected in his favour, but who remained true to their protestations, and sank any personal feeling in the interests of the party. Before the election the prospect of hearing these three—McNeill, Romans, and Ward—would fill any building in the city. McNeill, though turbulent and illogical, and impossible as a legislator, had a quite extraordinary gift of speech; Romans could touch any audience on the intellectual side; and Ward, while less experienced than the other two, possessed more culture, at least as much enthusiasm, and in a different manner was quite as effective as either. The final meeting held in the Sydney Town Hall the night before the election proved a popular triumph. The building was packed not only with members of the democratic party, but by scores and hundreds of society people, both men and women, keenly interested in politics, who were there to sample the new speakers as they would have sampled a new play that had been cried up in the newspapers.

When men begin to talk about you, you may be only unfortunate. When women begin to talk

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about you, you are not so obscure as you used to be. Arthur Ward was a case in point. Miss Dorrington had been at the Town Hall on the night of that final meeting. And now, twenty-four hours afterwards, when the result of the polling was known, she was discussing with Mrs. Harper in the latter's drawing-room one of the people familiar in this history.

"He left word to say he would call for you here," said Mrs. Harper, glancing at the clock.

Miss Dorrington drummed with one foot on the carpet. She did not appear to have heard the remark. When she spoke it was more to herself than to the listener.

"He interests me—that man!"

"Naturally!"

"Oh, I don't mean what you mean. It doesn't follow that because a girl's engaged to a man she is going to think of him, and nothing but him, morning, noon, and night. I was thinking of that young man I heard speak at the meeting—Mr. Ward."

"I was rather surprised at you spending the evening there."

"Why surprised?"

"Only because most girls would prefer to be with the man they are engaged to than to be at a political meeting."

"Well, just for a change, Mirabel. I'm not a political woman, but I really am fond of politics.

If I were a man I would rather go in for politics than anything. It's exciting, it's *lovely* to hear someone talking to a whole crowd, a whole hall full of people, and to hear them cheer. It makes you feel bigger somehow; it makes you remember that there are other things beside dressing for dinner and wondering how you are going to pass the day."

The other woman had her eyes on her lap, watching the piece of ornamental work that was growing under her hand.

"What do you think? You won't be shocked when you hear it?—I spoke to that Mr. Ward coming out of the hall. He was coming along the side passage as we three—Gladys, her brother, and I—were going down the main steps. He seemed to be in a hurry to get out of the crowd and nearly ran into us. I seized the opportunity, while the others were getting into the carriage, to tell him that I liked his speech very much."

"What did he say to that?"

"I don't think he said anything, at least nothing particular. He smiled and passed on."

"He would have been pleased."

"That's the doubtful part of it. He didn't look pleased, or as if he cared whether I liked his speech or not. He just smiled politely, took off his hat, and that was the end of it. And my vanity was hurt, though if he had stopped, and smirked, and sniggered, I should have despised him."

"When," inquired Mrs. Harper, with one of those rapid changes of a conversational position for which she was famous—"when is it going to be?"

"Now," said the Judge's daughter, leaning forward in Brown-Potteresque fashion, with her chin resting on one hand, "what a question to ask me! As if I wouldn't have told you before anyone else if I knew anything, or had decided anything. But I might as well acknowledge it—of course in strict confidence—he wants me to marry him at Easter—and I think I may."

"Easter? That will be in less than four months from now."

"I think I may. On the other hand it is possible that I may not. In the meantime, Desmond is as nice as anything, and the other girls are as envious as could be wished."

"I thought you had given up saying cynical things since Maud Rayment went away."

"I'm in too good form, and too well satisfied to be really cynical. But they always seem to expect me to go into raptures, and I'm not going to."

"But you are fond of him?"

"Yes."

"He's very good-looking."

"*Sans doute.*"

"And decidedly well off."

"Oughtn't you to have put that first?"

"The younger son of an English Honourable."

"Is it any wonder that some of the dear girls would like to kill me?"

"Well?"

For answer, Miss Dorrington leaned back in the chair and smiled. Then with a quick change of mood she sighed.

"It's curious, isn't it, though it's been said so often before, that the thing you haven't got is the thing you always want? Now in Desmond, I've got good looks, good birth, good manners, good disposition, and money—lots of it. And I wouldn't care to be without any of those things."

"I am sure you wouldn't. You would feel like the Lady of Lyons in the gardener's hut."

"And yet," the girl went on, looking earnestly at the other woman, "if I had a son I would want him to be clever—more clever than his father. And if he wasn't half as good-looking I would be just as pleased."

Mrs. Harper, a childless woman with quick sympathies, smiled a faint, rather sickly smile.

"You see there are so many things to think of. I am fond of Desmond—I haven't the least wish to give him up. But it's just a little bit hard on a woman to tie her up for life to the same eyes, face, figure, and beautifully parted hair. Don't be shocked Mirabel—you know it is—the best of us know it is."

"If the man is worth it," began Mrs. Harper, and stopped.

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The girl nodded.

"Yes. And I'm really fond of Desmond. If I had a choice of three husbands I believe I would pick him first."

"Oh! And who would the second be?"

"The opposite extreme. Someone cool, strong, and self-contained like—what do you say to Mr. Barraclough?"

"And the third?"

The girl laughed merrily.

"You're a little too inquisitive. But for the third experiment, if it came to that, I think I would pick someone different again. The only one I can think of at present is that pale-faced, big-eyed, strange-looking, Mr. Ward."

* * * * *

There is a path that winds in full view of the sea, along the outskirts of the Waverly cemetery. It is not much frequented, and it is out of sight of the main road. In the growing dusk the hundreds of tombstones within view of it stand out like white spectres. And just beyond them the darkening sea shudders and shines intermittently, before it is made one with the night.

It was early dusk on the evening after the election—the evening when his name was on the lips of the two women in Dr. Harper's drawing-room—that Arthur Ward walked along this road-way. His was the only figure in sight. His

step was firmer and more decided than in earlier days; not the step of a dreamer, not the step of one who is weak in body or uncertain in mind, but the step of one who had a definite and settled purpose in view.

He had just left the cemetery, where he had paid a visit to his brother's grave. He had a particular motive in going there. It was probable that in a few weeks he might be leaving Australia for ever. And with the recollection of much stir, and stress, and shouting still upon him—with the noise, and dust, and tumult of the hustings still clinging about his senses—he felt there was nothing better to do than to come for respite here. More calming to restless hopes and stormy ambitions than a bathe in the waters of Lethe would be a look, probably a last look, at the sod under which his young brother lay.

The most crowded and eventful chapter of a life was over. What was to happen next? Was it to be a return to the old groove, to the life of routine and hard work, to the deadening surroundings which must seem more flat and unprofitable than ever now the excitement of the combat was gone? A return to all this with no human interest, no brighter interest to give zest to the game?

What necessity was there to face the prospect? Why remain in Australia? Why not start afresh? Why not get away to London, which was always

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calling, calling, calling, literally shouting through its fogs and smoke to every man with a brain to think, and a pen to write, and a word to say?

A few minutes before, when passing out through the cemetery gates, he had met a woman coming in. She was evidently a poor woman, and with great care she was holding in her hand a few flowers. He was curious enough to watch her. With bent head and face, and in the manner of a devotee, she reverently placed the flowers on a grave that stood by itself, unmarked by any head-piece or memorial stone. Then she buried her face in her hands. The grave was Le Mercier's, the man watching her knew this because the spot had been pointed out to him once before. And the solitary mourner was Mrs. Kelly—the rough-handed, soft-hearted woman to whom the dead man had been not a dissipated and depraved waster and lounge, but her hero, practically her all in all. In the whole universe, it seemed to Arthur Ward, there was nothing sadder, and at the same time nothing finer than this—the visible embodiment of love, unselfish and unrecognised, stretching hopeless arms to the disembodied ghost that even in life had neither known nor cared.

And yet if for a moment the outward shell of things could be stripped off, if the bauble that went by the name of success could be

estimated at its true worth, might it not be said that even Le Mercier had not lived in vain? Would any man care to stand up at the day of Judgment and say that the gorgeous, ghastly pageant of a state funeral, with its hollow mockery of pomp, and its more hollow mockery of grief, was one tenth part so splendid as the grief that was witnessed here? Surely if there was to be an eternity it ought to be reserved for the man or woman whom someone, without sham or pretence, with complete abnegation and complete self-surrender, had loved until the end.

Thinking of these things, thinking of Le Mercier, thinking of the woman, thinking of what lay before himself, he found himself on board a tram-car bound for the city. The anodyne had done its work. The storm had nearly subsided and the horizon was becoming hourly more clear. There were a few business arrangements to be made, and then the curtain could be rung down on this, and rung up on another phase.

A surprise was in store. As he set foot inside the house the landlady met him and said, "There's someone waiting to see you."

Mrs. Garburn was in one respect a truly remarkable woman. Her complete lack of vocal or facial inflection bordered on the sublime. It would not have mattered whether the visitor had been a royal duke in full regalia, or an escaped lunatic of dangerous homicidal tendencies. She

would merely have said to the person who had been asked for, "There's someone waiting to see you," and would then have gone on with the business she had in hand.

Arthur walked into the little downstairs parlour. And there sitting close to the window in the deepening gloom was a woman with a veil drawn back from her face—the face that had so persistently risen before him in the days gone by.

"You!"

"Yes," said Miss Rayment, "it is I."

He struck a match, lit the gas, and going over to the window drew down the blind.

"To think," he exclaimed, standing and looking at her, not quite sure whether this was a trick which his nerves were playing on him after the stress and excitement of the past few days, "to think that it should be you—you—after all this time!"

"It has been a long time," she assented. "More like a lifetime than six months."

"Did you"—it was necessary to say something—"did you want to see me?"

"Did I want to see you!" The same musical voice, challenging through the same full and smiling lips. "Was it modesty made you ask that question? Or did you think that it was your charming landlady that I came to see? I must tell you that it cost me a lot of trouble

and a long cab drive to get here—to say nothing of the risk of being found out. And I wore this horrible thick veil that nearly suffocated me.”

“When did you get back?”

“We came overland from Adelaide yesterday.”

“How did you find out where I lived?”

“Ah, that was easy. You have become a person of some importance nowadays.”

This did not seem to call for a reply.

“Any more questions? You haven’t said yet that you were pleased to see me.”

He sat down at the table, leaning his elbow upon it, and resting his head on his hand. He looked across at her in a curious impersonal fashion—a look that was the reflex of the curious, impersonal feeling that her presence inspired in him now. Yes, the old fire had burnt itself to ashes. Was that something to be glad or sorry for? Which was the better after all—the troubled ocean or this dead silent sea?

“I expect,” he said, still looking at her, “I am quite as pleased to see you as you are to see me.”

She returned the look earnestly as though seeking to read what was behind it. Probably she did read. At any rate the look of the woman towards the past and prospective lover—the coquettish, inviting, tempting, defying look—suddenly gave way to another, and a totally

different expression. Whatever associations, whatever pleasant memories the sight of him had called up, had vanished, and she had become again what behind all her pleasure-loving and voluptuous nature she invariably was—a practical and far-sighted woman of the world.

She left her seat at the window and took a chair at the table near him.

“I must be gone in a few minutes. It wouldn’t do for them to know I was here. I might tell Geoffrey afterwards, but not yet. I suppose you didn’t know that we have arranged to be married next month?”

“Indeed! I didn’t know it—how could I?” (After a pause). “I can only say that I congratulate you both—very much.”

“Ah! don’t talk like that. If you can only say those hollow sort of things don’t say anything. You know that you don’t like Geoffrey.”

“I’m not sure that I dislike him.”

“And you don’t like me.”

He looked at her again—a look which she returned but seemed to get lost in the mazes of.

“Well!” he said, with a curious reminiscent smile, “considering what has passed—and the wealth of affection you have lavished upon me——”

He ended the sentence by thrusting his hands into his pockets and gazing meditatively through the wall at the phantoms of things that had been real but a few months ago.

She smiled slightly, but immediately became serious again—more serious than he had ever yet known her.

“Oh, I must make haste. There are some things I want to tell you. I’m not superstitious and I very seldom worry—I should have been dead before this, if I had been that sort of woman—but I couldn’t do what I am going to do, I simply couldn’t marry him without getting this off my mind. And there is no one that I can tell, or ever will tell, but you.”

“Are you sure you want to tell me?”

She did not seem to hear the question.

“You see we were both mixed up in it—in one way—you and I. It was your brother who was killed and it was my——”

Something seemed to choke her, but presently she went on again :

“I couldn’t speak to you now, but you were fond of me once, and I seem to know you so well, and I know that if I told you, you would never betray me.”

“I thank you at least for saying that.”

“We should not have been back so soon”—she was speaking more calmly and looking closely, she began to fathom his mood—“but I got a cablegram to say that Le Mercier was dead.”

“Did that make so much difference?”

“Yes—all the difference.”

“You mean that he had been”—the slow measured tone left the last word almost unsaid—“your lover?”

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"No," she flashed back at him, "not that. Not my lover—but my husband!"

"Oh!"

"So there you know it. It all happened when I was a very young girl—when father was very poor and no one knew about us. It was kept secret. We never lived in the same house. He was going to make me a home, but he never did, and my eyes were opened to what sort of man he was. And when we got on in the world father gave him money to keep him from making claims on me. He seemed satisfied as long as the money was paid, though I always felt as though a sword was hanging over me."

"Does anyone know of this except your father and mother?"

"No. I will say that for him—he kept the secret well."

"Does Mr. O'Brien—the man you are going to marry—know of it?"

"No."

"If I were you I would tell him."

"I *won't* tell him."

There was a storm of pent-up passion in her voice and her eyes blazed.

"I *won't* tell him. Has he been true to me all the time I've been away, or all the time before I went away? Has he never been anything to anyone else but me? Has he never met a woman whom he ought to have married—even if he didn't marry her—Heaven knows how often?"

Her laugh was the bitterest and most scornful that he had ever heard.

"Oh, I like to hear you men talk. There is to be one law for us and another for you. You can do what you like, and we are to be sacrificed all the time. He can live a fast life for as many years as he likes, and because I made one mistake when I knew no better, I am not good enough for him if you please—I am to be branded like some inferior sort of animal and turned adrift."

Her vehemence at this point astonished him.

"If he were a good man, if you were all good men and spotless, as you expect a woman to be, it would be different. I swear to God, if a man were true to me I would be true to him. I'm not a bad woman; I'm only a natural woman. And if we are going to get married, what business is it of anybody? If he wants to marry me, let him—let him—do you hear?"

"I have not another word to say. But tell me one thing: If you think this of the man, if you despise him as you seem to, why do you want to marry him?"

"Oh! It's not like that; I don't despise him. I'm not blaming him, even. We don't rave about each other, but we like each other well enough. We've both got over the silly stage. And the marriage means a lot to me. Socially and in other ways, it means a lot to me."

"Heaven knows I have no right to blame anyone. I think I understand."

She gave him a quick, grateful glance, but she was more troubled and more excited than before.

"There is only one other thing, and I must say it, though it kills me. You remember—you remember the night your brother died? Well, Le Mercier was in my room that night."

The shadows on a window blind seemed to come shuddering back.

"He must have been drunk or something. He wanted to stay, though I kept telling him to go. I got him away at last, but he said he would come back. And I was out of my senses. I got a revolver—from father's room"—she gasped for breath—"is that brandy in the flask there? I'm a little faint—give me some."

She drank some of the spirit, and it revived her.

"Le Mercier is dead, and he—he said nothing. He took the blame. I only meant to frighten him. I never dreamed that it was not he, but——"

"Stop!"

The imperious command frightened her.

"For God's sake, stop! You mustn't tell me anything more. I won't answer for myself if you do."

"Can't you see that if I was the sort of woman who sat down and brooded over things, I should be stark, staring mad. I had either to forget or go crazy. And I managed to forget."

There was silence for a full minute. When it was over she had risen to go. He could see that, with the marvellous vitality that was part of her unequalled

mental and physical equipment, she had recovered from the effects of the terrible mood of a few minutes before.

She held out her hand, with lips uncertainly smiling and eyes swimming over.

"Will you take it, and never remember that a woman came to see you here to-night?"

"I shall never recall it," he said, staggering to his feet, and just touching her hand, but keeping his face turned away; "you can be all the more sure of that, as in a few days I shall have left Australia."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE DECLINING SUN.



THE clock pointed to four in the afternoon. A couple of portmanteaux were lying packed on the floor, and a drawer containing letters, manuscripts, printed papers, and other relics was being pulled about.

“Can I help you, sir?”

Recalled from wide ranging thoughts by the question, he looked round. The head of Mrs. Garburn was visible in the room. Her figure was concealed behind the slightly opened door.

The inquiry suggested friendliness, a desire to help. But the impassive face, and still more the tone of voice, denied emphatically that such a poor thing as sentiment had any bearing on the situation.

“Thank you, no. I have nearly finished.”

The head disappeared.

“Mrs. Garburn!”

There it was back again.

“A gentleman sent me a telegram to say that

he would call about this time. It's too late to stand on ceremony. If he calls, show him up here."

She said "Yes," and he turned to his packing again.

The clock pointed to half-past four. The sorting was completed. The things to be kept had been finally separated from the things to be destroyed—and the result showed the former to be marvellously few.

A ring at the bell caused an involuntary start. Was it the man or the woman this time? Probably the man. It was the hour of his appointment. The prospects of seeing the woman again were becoming momentarily less. Yet, what folly was it to look for a meeting that must inevitably be painful, and could do no good?

"I should apologise," said Johansen, with the stately manner which never deserted him, "for intruding upon you here. But I wished to see you. I hoped, and I may say I still hope—though these preparations leave little ground for it—that you may have changed your mind."

"You are very kind." If the words were formal the tone was not. "I have done nothing to deserve your kindness. Perhaps for that reason I appreciate it all the more."

"My dear fellow," exclaimed the politician puzzled, and a little testily, "I can't understand it. Why should you want to go away—now, of all times? As I reminded you in my letter, the Federal

elections will be coming on early next year, and your chance of winning a seat would, I venture to say, be second to none. And as I mentioned also, I am willing to give you any assistance in my power."

The younger man flushed a little. Notice of this kind from a man like Johansen was unusual, and inclined to be embarrassing.

"I am free to confess that I did not want to see you standing in Smith's shoes. I did not—I may tell you now—advise your selection. The larger Federal arena is the better one for you. It is the one I propose to enter myself."

"You are more than kind. If anything in the world would have made me remain, it would have been your letter. I hesitated a long while. But two things decided me to go."

"What were they?"

"In the first place, it is not at all certain that I should be returned."

"You would have an excellent chance, at any rate. It would be idle to affirm"—with the peculiar manner that impressed everybody—"that there is any certainty about these affairs."

"I know. And, if you will allow me to say so, I think you rather over-estimate my chances of success. I should have to satisfy the Labour Unions, the Progressive League, the advanced democrats, the moderate democrats, the single taxers, the faddists of fifty kinds, and thousands

of other people as well. And then there would be the Press, which might be favourable to me, or might not. Apart from that, there would be the scores of men who have been longer at the game than I have, and who think they have a better claim upon the seat than I have. It is not a question of ability. Not that at all. It is a question of influence, of advertisement, of personal likes and dislikes, of drum-beating, cymbal-banging, and wire-pulling *in excelsis*."

"Someone must win, and why not you?"

"I thought of that too. Don't believe that I'm afraid to fight the seat—not that for a moment. But since I have been mixed up in politics a little, the idea of winning—even if I could win, of which I am not at all sure—doesn't appeal to me as it did a few months ago. It seems to me now that there are other things better worth while. And the second consideration is this: A book I wrote three years ago has been dug up, and has brought me in a little money and a little—a very little—reputation. What is more important, it will give me an introduction to a London publisher, and may give me a start in a bigger life."

"A book of yours! I can't say I have heard of it."

"Nor anyone else until a few weeks back. But since I have been talked about—since my name has got into the newspapers—they have been putting this thing in the shop windows. One or two critics

have discovered for a fact, what no one even suspected before, that it contains originality, distinction, boldness, 'the refinement of neo-paganism'—whatever that means."

"What do you propose to do in London?"

"Write—and keep on writing. Starve, perhaps—but not necessarily keep on starving, because Nature herself imposes a limit of time on that process."

"Your mind is made up, then?"

"Yes."

"In that case," said Johansen, rising from his seat and preparing to leave, "I have nothing more to say. But it just occurs to me—would you like a letter to anyone over there? I was representing the colony at Diamond Jubilee time, and met a good many people, publishers and newspaper editors among them."

The younger man looked at him with a sudden thought and a sudden hesitation.

"If I only thank you for that generous offer, will you allow me, in place of accepting it, to ask you to do something else? Something that concerns another than myself."

"Yes?"—interrogatively, with a slight lifting of the eyebrows.

"It may seem folly to ask it, and I am presuming to do what I dare say no one else would do. But there is someone here in Sydney—where, I don't know—whom it makes me sick to think I shall probably not see again."

"Ah, you'll get over that."

"Perhaps—and perhaps not. Her name is Edith Grey, and you may possibly have seen her at Rayment's house. If by any chance you meet her or hear of her—I know it's wildly improbable, but there is just this fact that you will be twelve thousand miles nearer to her than I will—I venture to ask that you might do something for her, or see that she comes to no harm."

"H'm," said Johansen, dubiously. "Who is she? What is her address?"

"I don't even know that for certain, but I believe the General Post Office will find her."

"H'm!" exclaimed Johansen, still more dubiously, pausing in the middle of the room. "It's rather a vague sort of commission, is it not?"

The other man had risen impulsively from his chair, but he sank down in it again.

"Of course it is," he muttered, "sheer mad folly and presumption to ask it. I know that. But I have been thinking about this so much lately that I couldn't help speaking about it, even to you."

The unmistakeable dejection in the voice was its strongest appeal. And it was not altogether thrown away.

"My dear boy," said Johansen, "I can understand what you feel. We've all had our day. I may not be able to do very much, but I'll do this: I'll get Mrs. Johansen to write the girl a line at the General Post Office, and invite her to come to the

house. If she doesn't come, I'm afraid I can't do anything; but if she does, she won't want a friend."

"I should only make an idiot of myself," said Arthur Ward, "if I tried to thank you, or tried to say another word."

Johansen held out his hand, which the other took, and then the wheels of a cab were heard driving off.

The clock had got round to five. The sole occupant of the room went to the window and looked out. It was an inviting prospect. The light of a declining summer's day was reflected from housetops and the distant sea. What a panorama! What a tint of soft light, brilliant enough to charm the senses, and yet not glaring enough to tire the eye! What a dark, restful line of rising ground and of bush in the distance—the unchanging line that the Australian recognises as one of the welcoming symbols of home! And how, in contrast to that more sombre line, the red-roofed tiles of a thousand houses fringing the harbour smiled a Danae smile of welcome to the gold of the descending sun! And how that small white-winged craft, one of hundreds, came dancing out from the sheltering promontory across the laughing waters of the bay!

By next evening he would be out of reach of it all. Yet the sight of it did him good. The ship was to leave early in the morning. For years to come the thought of this harbour city, the memory of it as he

could see it now, would come between him and much that it was necessary to forget. Yet would it come between? Would it? He hoped at any rate that it would.

The bell rang again. This time it must be she. He had never really believed that, having heard, as she must have heard of his intending departure from Australia, she would utter no word and give no sign. The sickening hope that it might be she was met and strangled by the messenger of reason, which told him that it would be better for him, better perhaps for her, if it were not.

Anticipating Mrs. Garburn, he was down the stairs and had opened the door. It was Edith, and he led her into the room where the other woman had made the confession of a few nights before.

Once there she seemed to realise that she had done a daring thing. She stood up wondering, uncertain, tremulous. He released her hand and pushed a chair towards her.

"I am so glad to see you," he said, looking at her but not coming any closer. "You don't know how glad I am."

"I heard—it was in the paper—that you were going away. I have come to wish you good-bye."

Yes, I am going away, and the thought has been torturing me that I would never have the chance to tell you how much I loathed and detested myself for having said one word or done the least thing to offend you or frighten you—as I did that night.

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Because you are here now I know that you have forgiven me and that you wish me well."

"It said to-morrow—are you going away to-morrow?"

"Yes. The boat leaves at daybreak, and the passengers must be on board to-night."

She rose from the seat, and coming over towards him looked as if she were going to fall. He supported her in his arms, and her soft dark hair brushed his face.

"Ah, why do you go away?" The words were just audible. "Why do you want to leave me? It has been so hard—and now it will be harder still."

"I have nothing to offer you—no riches, no home, not even a name."

"I don't think of them—only of you."

"You heard what I said—not even a name."

"I would rather anything, anything, than the old life—and the other people—I can't bear it."

"Let me think for a minute—I can't while I am talking to you like this."

He released her and went to the window, looking out into the darkness. Then he began pacing up and down the room.

"I wouldn't have stayed," he muttered to himself, "not for Johansen—nor any of them. But this—this is different—what ought I to do?"

Something seemed to prompt her to say the right word.

"I am sure you ought to stay in Australia. It

would be wrong—ever so wrong—to go away now ; they are just beginning to know you, and to talk about you ; you wanted that ; why should you throw it all away ? ”

“ Ah ! ” he murmured doubtfully, still walking up and down the room, but with a new and different expression beginning to grow in his eyes.

“ Oh ! don’t think I’m selfish,” she went on passionately, “ because I want you to stay ; it is not that at all, I put myself out of the question altogether. But I know—I know they will want you here, and I hear them saying they are going to have Federation—isn’t it so ?—and that the men who understand things will be wanted in Australia more than ever now.”

He still said nothing, but the look on his face had changed.

“ But if you have made up your mind,” she said, sinking down in a chair and burying her face in her hands, “ go and don’t think of me—go—I shall do—very well.”

The man made a step forward and drew her hands from her face.

“ Dear girl,” he said, “ I have done my best to think this matter out, and to do the right thing for both of us, even if it seemed hard ; I never doubted I could be happier here with you—but now I believe—I am sure it is wiser as you say. There is more, far more to be gained by staying than going away.”

She looked at him tearfully, but radiantly smiling.

"Oh, I am glad ; you will get a reputation, you will become famous, I know you will."

"No, no," he answered deprecatingly, "life has something to give more real than that ; but whatever comes," speaking very earnestly, "we will share it together, will we not?"

She was wholly pleased, but doubtful and half afraid.

"Not unless you really wish it," she said. "You will do what is best, and not mind me."

He assured her that he wished it more than anything else, and in the exaltation of the moment meant what he said. Neither in later times, after the wave of emotionalism had broken, did there seem any reason to regret that its overmastering force had carried them both so far. For he grew to realise that her woman's devotion, strong, unselfish, and unwavering, was the brightest beacon of any leading to the harbour of Content.

THE END.

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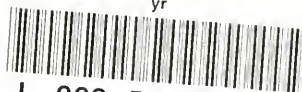


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